METRO / A19

2 container vans yield chemicals for making shabu

ACROSS / A15

Manobo evacuees return to ransacked homes in Surigao

WORLD / A22

Suicide bomber strikes at Pakistan mosque; 50 killed

SATURDAY SPECIAL / H2

Girls gone wild dominate 2007 show biz headlines

PROPERTY / B2-1

2008 property forecast: Positive growth from OFWs, but be wary

ATMs bear brunt of holiday splurge

By Daxim L. Lucas

FILIPINOS ARE SPLURGING THIS CHRISTmas season, and automated teller machines (ATM) are having a hard time keeping up with the huge demand for cash.

Even so, the country's ATM networks have promised to keep their cash machines well-stocked with bills during the long

ATMs/ A10

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Saturday, December 22, 2007 ★★ 14 sections / Vol. 23 / No. 14 P18 website: www.inquirer.net

Pangasinan natives meet in cyberspace

By Gabriel Cardinoza
Inquirer N. Luzon

HI-TECH PANGASINENSES

DAGUPAN CITY—Somewhere in cyberspace, Pangasinenses around the world converge.

Pangasinan Online

PANGASINAN/ A11

55 farmers flying home

Gov't given 'space' to fulfill GMA promise of Sumilao land

By Beverly T. Natividad and Jerome Aning

THE 55 FARMERS WHO walked 1,700 kilometers to Manila for two months to press their claim to a disputed property will return home on Sunday to Sumilao, Bukidnon, in a C-130 plane promised to them by President Macapagal-Arroyo.

In a press conference yesterday at the Manila headquarters of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, the farmers said their journey back to Bukidnon did not mean that they were giving up their fight for the land.

They said they were merely "giving the government the space to fulfill [its] public pronouncements—that the 144 hectares in Sumilao will be covered by agrarian reform, and that [they] will be reinstated in the land that is rightfully [theirs]."

The farmers warned that they were "willing to retrace [their] steps from Sumilao back to Malacañang" should the government fail to make good on its promise.

Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo said at the same press conference that the farmers were now entering a

55 SUMILAO/ A8

KM 0
BALIK! ang 144 hectares sa SUMILAO FARMERS

GROUND ZERO. Higaonon farmers, who walked more than 1,700 kilometers from Bukidnon to Manila to demand land ownership, rest at Km Zero at Rizal Park before going to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines in Intramuros. REM ZAMORA

Agri federation backs farmers on land claim

By Amy R. Remo

THE LARGEST FEDERATION OF farmers and fisherfolk yesterday took issue with the assertion of a big business group that the Malacañang ruling on the Sumilao land dispute was based more on emotion and not on the rule of law.

Ernesto Ordoñez, chair of Alyansa Agrikultura and former agriculture undersecretary, said the executive order issued by President Macapagal-Arroyo that favored the farmers claiming a 144-hectare property had, in fact, upheld the rule of law by giving the land back to its rightful owners.

"We strongly agree that the rule of law, and not emotions, should be followed, and this is it. On the contrary, the ruling sends the correct signal to investors because it shows them we can follow the law," Ordoñez told the INQUIRER.

He said the order had strong legal grounds and was backed by eminent legal minds, includ-

AGRI FEDERATION/ A8

'Amparo' granted to kin of 2 activists

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—THE ILOILO Regional Trial Court (RTC) has granted a writ of amparo to the families of two activists who have been missing for eight months following their abduction allegedly by the military.

In the two-page writ dated Dec. 17, Judge Narciso Aguilar directed President Macapagal-Arroyo and nine top military and police officials to release Nilo Arado and Maria Luisa-Posa Dominado if they are in their custody.

Arado is the regional chair of the leftist Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, while Dominado is the spokesperson of the Samahan ng mga Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at para sa Amnestiya (Selda) in Panay.

Aguilar also directed the respondents to submit affidavits of their defense and other information related to the writ within five working days.

Dominado's daughter May Wan and Arado's wife Rosemarie jointly filed on Dec. 17

AMPARO/ A8

Seized luxury cars entered Cebu, dealers suspect

By Jolene R. Bulambot and Jhunnex Napallacan
Inquirer Visayas

CEBU CITY—HAS CEBU BEcome a smugglers' paradise rivaling Subic Bay Freeport?

The seizure in a Makati City shop on Thursday of 81 luxury vehicles, including Porches, Jaguars, Mercedes Benzes and BMWs, allegedly smuggled from here has raised this question.

The Cebu Auto Dealers Association (Cada) has suspected this all along, noting high-end automobiles plying the city streets. These are not available in any of the Cebu auto dealers' showrooms.

Customs Commissioner Napoleon Morales has ordered an investigation to determine if the 81 cars seized in Makati were legally imported.

Morales said the bureau would summon the owner of the Auto Sports 24 Corp. warehouse where the vehicles were found by the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group (PASG) to show proof of legality of their importation.

Since a warrant of seizure and detention was already issued, he said the bureau would send a notice of hearing to give the owner of the vehicles the opportunity to present the pertinent documents over the seized "hot cars."

"We will go through the process because we can't just arrest

SEIZED/ A11

Esperon says Lacson in coup plot

By Nikko Dizon

GEN. HERMOGENES ESPERON Jr. yesterday linked Sen. Panfilo Lacson to the February 2006 plot to overthrow President Macapagal-Arroyo, citing a document called the "Diamond Statement" that purportedly gave the former Philippine National Police chief a role in a new government.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines chief of staff said he saw Lacson's name in the mysterious document.

Esperon will release the paper when he retires on Feb. 9 next year and becomes a witness against Lacson, he told reporters at the AFP's 72nd founding anniversary. He said he would then be able to talk freely about the document and would be willing to do this in any forum that would investigate it.

Lacson denied knowledge of the document. "I don't know what he's talking about," he said of Esperon's charge.

Little was known about the so-called "Diamond Statement" "until Esperon was asked to comment on Lacson's claim that

ESPERON/ A10

CHILD-FRIENDLY. Eight-year-old Julius Navales holds a butterfly at the atrium of the DENR main building in Quezon City. JOAN BONDOC

Butterflies greet visitors to DENR

By TJ Burgonio

BUTTERFLIES FLUTTERING IN A GARden inside the Department of Environment and Natural Resources building are a feast for the eyes of employees and visitors.

"They're a beautiful sight," a woman gushed as she and her friend stopped to gawk at the butterflies flitting among the plants and ferns in the landscaped garden.

The butterfly garden can't be missed. It lies inside a glass-covered, square-shaped atrium at the center of the DENR building in Quezon City.

Drawn by the sight of the butterflies in various hues and sizes, a boy ventured inside and tried to catch one—until he

BUTTERFLIES/ A10

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Visayas and Mindanao will experience cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms. The rest of the country will have partly cloudy to at times cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers.

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	**Iloilo/Bacolod**	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	**Roxas**	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	**Cebu**	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	**Tacloban**	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	**Gen. Santos**	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	**Zamboanga**	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Partly Cloudy	**Cagayan de Oro**	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	**Davao**	Cloudy with Rains

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New RP lobby deal bared

Roxas asks Palace to scrap $50-M contract with US firm

By Gil C. Cabacungan, Jr.

SEN. MAR ROXAS YESTERDAY URGED Malacañang to scrap its $50 million, six-month contract with American lobby firm, Covington & Burling LLP, which would cost more than Washington's military aid to the Philippines.

Roxas said he was familiar with the rates charged for normal trade access or information access and believed the $50 million was for "something more, perhaps like getting the US Defense and Military establishment to soften resistance to a new strain of Martial Law."

"If they can't defend this in Plaza Miranda or any market in the country, then they should junk it altogether," Roxas said in a statement.

Roxas revealed that the pricey contract was signed between the Philippine Embassy in Washington D.C. and Covington & Burling to "promote the interests of the Republic of the Philippines with the US Congress and the US Government on a range of political, economic, and security issues."

Contract provisions

"Who is behind this contract and why? Who is ready to stand before the people and explain what this contract is all about and why $50-million of the people's money should be spent on this rather than on school-feeding programs, better health services, and other priorities?" he asked.

ROXAS

Roxas demanded that the government publish in full the provisions of the multimillion dollar contract to avoid a repeat of the controversy generated by the P50 million Venable LLP contract in 2005.

Malacañang was forced to cancel the Venable contract after it was found that National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales tapped the US-based law firm Venable to lobby for funding for Philippine government projects, including Charter change.

Roxas, who chairs the Senate trade and commerce committee, said the new lobby contract was a concrete example of how wasteful and how untransparent this administration was in its spending.

"What can Covington do that our own Philippine Embassy cannot accomplish? $50-million for a prominent US lobby firm is P2 billion worth of assistance to disadvantaged sectors like farmers, fishermen, distressed OFWs, malnourished children and many others," said Roxas.

Public bidding

He insisted that foreign contracts such as this must go through public bidding and be imbued with transparency and accountability.

Roxas said this was the reason why it was better for the government to cut its taxes, like suspending the expanded value added tax on oil products, so people can maximize their money instead of seeing their taxes flushed away in questionable deals like the Covington & Burling deal.

On July, 25, 2005, Gonzales and Baltimore-based lobby firm Venable LLP signed an agreement for the latter to help seek funding from the United States for the Philippine government's plan to shift to a parliamentary system.

Venable was also tasked to help secure loans for the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police. The firm was also to facilitate the re-inclusion of the Philippines in various US assistance programs.

Agreement signed

The agreement for one year would take effect after Venable got its retainer fee for the first three months (The firm expected to be paid $75,000 monthly).

In the Senate probe that ensued, Gonzales admitted that he had signed an agreement and that the three-month's worth of retainer fees for Venable have already been paid.

In one of the hearings, Gonzales' blood pressure shot up. He was whisked off to the Philippine Heart Center and placed under the Senate sergeant-at-arms' custody while in the hospital.

President Macapagal-Arroyo eventually scrapped the deal in September 2005 because of the Charter change issue and because it "became unnecessarily controversial."

Senators unanimously voted to release Gonzales from custody on Oct. 26, 2005 so he can seek treatment, but maintained that he should be held accountable for entering into contract with Venable. *With Eliza Victoria, Inquirer Research*

WHAT'S INSIDE

'WOWOWEE' cheating on YouTube? 'Chiz' urges probe /A4

REVILLAME

NIELSEN stands by TV rating /A6

PCGG EXECS deny Philcomsat "massive" payoffs /A7

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POLYTRON

Running priest returns to Hong Kong

By Blanche S. Rivera
Correspondent

HONG KONG—RUNNING PRIEST FR. Robert Reyes is back in Hong Kong, shaking off a hold-departure order that his lawyer argued should have been lifted with the dismissal of the rebellion charge against him.

Reyes, who was detained for 14 days in Camp Crame for his presence at the Manila Peninsula Hotel during the siege, flew in on Dec. 19 to work out his employment at the Chinese University here.

He said Immigration officials tried to bar him from leaving on Wednesday, but his lawyer Frank Chavez spoke with the Immigration officer and explained that the priest could not be held because there was no case against him.

"I thought the hold-departure would be automatically lifted with the dismissal of the charge but they (Immigration) said it did not work that way. Each of us in the list has to facilitate the lifting of his own HDO," Reyes said in an interview a day after he arrived.

Hundreds of overseas Filipino workers in Hong Kong had been clamoring for Reyes' return to the city. A Free Father Robert campaign would have been launched, but Reyes was released before the group could make an appeal with the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines.

The priest has formed at least two organizations here: Lakbay Lingap and Buhay Ka, a group of cancer survivors and caregivers, many of them domestic workers.

"That's why I made every effort to come back to Hong Kong immediately," he said.

Reyes, who has been criticized by some sectors here, maintained that he was "clueless" until he got to the Manila Peninsula, where Magdalo soldiers were holed in on Nov. 28.

"I don't feel bad and angry. I understand situations like that require some secrecy but for people who are major players in a serious situation, we should at least have an idea. I didn't have an idea," he said.

Reyes said he went to the Philippines to find a caregiver for his aging parents and attend a reunion of his former classmates who had opted out of the seminary. He was supposed to fly back to Hong Kong on Nov. 30.

Late evening on Nov. 27, Kilusang Makabansang Ekonomiya chair Jimmy Regalario called him and asked that he celebrate Mass for the urban poor in Makati, which he turned down, but Regalario was persistent.

"I would not say I was misled, but I didn't know the whole plan," Reyes said.

He said he still held his conviction "never to subscribe to violence."

"Some people are lumping me with Trillanes and confusing the methodology with the objectives," Reyes said.

"At least Trillanes knows where he wants to go, and our dreams are somehow similar. I agree to the dream but not through military might and violence," he said.

The priest will spend Christmas in Hong Kong before flying to the Philippines in January to officiate a wedding.

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CHEATING REHEARSAL?

Solon urges probe of 'Wowowee' video on YouTube

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A SENATOR HAS URGED THE DEPARTMENT of Trade and Industry to investigate a new video on YouTube showing a rehearsal of the noontime game show "Wowowee" where two different numbers signifying amounts won turned up in the same prize wheel.

Sen. Francis Escudero said the DTI should look into the video to ensure the games on the show were not rigged.

A YouTube video uploaded on Dec. 18 showed "Wowowee" host Willie Revillame in undershirt, cargo shorts and flip-flops in rehearsal with his co-hosts, dancers and a pseudo contestant.

Later, Revillame is shown pulling on the cover of a gold-colored prize wheel to show a "0" at one time and the number .5 for P500,000 at another.

The video was reminiscent of the Aug. 20 "Wilyonaryo" segment on Wowowee that showed Revillame on nationwide television pulling out two numbers (a zero and a 2) from the same prize wheel. The video also made it to YouTube and sparked calls for an investigation.

Bong Osorio, head of corporate communications at ABS-CBN, which produces "Wowowee," said yesterday he found it "uncanny" the latest controversy came when the network was involved in a civil suit against AGB Nielsen whose ratings surveys have been placed in doubt by allegations of cheating allegedly in favor of rival TV network GMA 7.

Resurrection of old issue

Osorio told the INQUIRER in a text message the video was "a resurrection of an old issue. We have thoroughly answered these questions and presented evidence when we were called by various government bodies last August."

The Aug. 20 episode also sparked a word war between Revillame and host Joey de Leon of GMA 7's own noontime show, "Eat Bulaga."

Escudero wondered why the DTI had not revealed the results of its investigation into the "Wilyonaryo" controversy after more than three months.

He said the Senate would have to look into the "Wowowee" controversy with or without the DTI report considering the issue was a major concern of the public, most of whom are TV viewers.

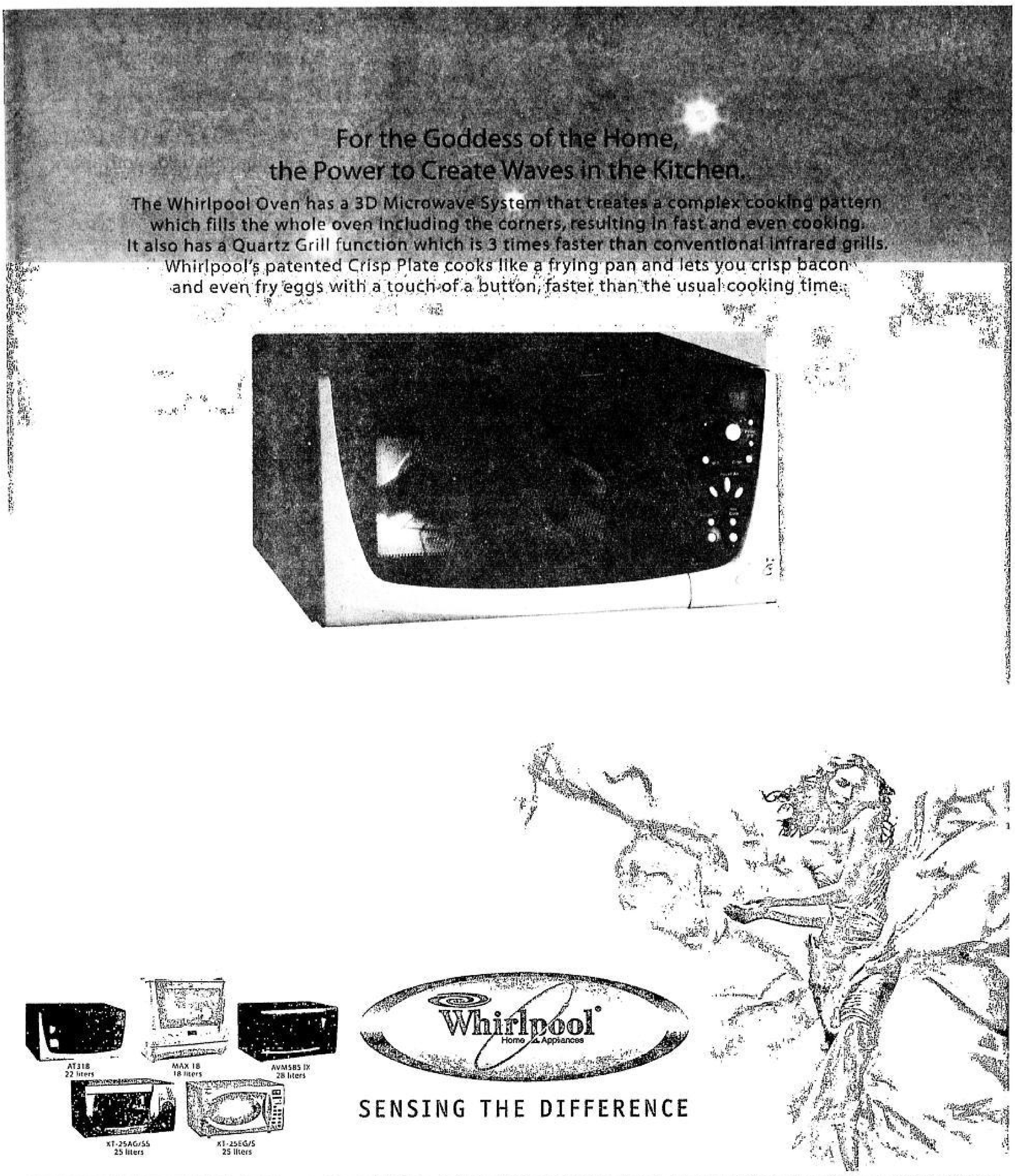
The DTI in September summoned Revillame and ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp. to explain the Aug. 20 incident where viewers saw two numbers in the P2-million jackpot wheel of the "Wilyonaryo" game.

Revillame explained there were two numbers in the wheel to keep the "excitement" up while viewers guessed which wheel held the top prize. He apologized for the incident which the producers said was an "honest mistake."

Osorio said ABS-CBN was investigating who uploaded the latest video on YouTube and asked the Internet video exchange to remove it from its files.

He said the video appeared to have been taken around the time the "Wilyonaryo" portion "was being launched." He said the segment was scrapped from "Wowowee" three to four weeks after the controversial show.

Under the Consumer Act, Republic Act No. 7374, TV game show cheats may be penalized up to P300,000 and imprisoned for up to six months.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Per DTI-NCR Permit No 5922 Series of 2007

CA upholds conviction of Laguna mayor's killers

By Leila B. Salaverria

THE COURT OF APPEALS HAS AFfirmed the murder and homicide convictions of two men who ambushed and killed a Laguna town mayor and two others in Rizal province in 2001.

The appellate court, however, reduced the sentences imposed on Edward Librea and Donato Bulasag from death penalty to *reclusion perpetua* due to the repeal of the death penalty law.

The court also raised to P2.8 million the damages they must pay one of the victims, and increased their sentence for the homicide conviction to a minimum of 10 years and one day to a maximum of 20 years.

Librea and Bulasag were earlier found guilty of killing Mabitac, Laguna Mayor Bernardo Sayarot, Gabriel Fuentes and SPO2 Eduardo Seña. They were convicted of two counts of murder and one count of homicide with direct assault upon an agent of authority by a Pasig Regional Trial Court in February 2005.

The suspects, with two other unidentified companions, ambushed the van carrying Sayarot and Fuentes in Teresa, Rizal. Both were killed instantly due to multiple bullet wounds on their heads and bodies.

Responding policemen gave chase to the car of the suspects and caught up with them. But as the policemen approached the suspects' car on foot, they were fired upon, killing Seña. The police returned fire, but Librea and Bulasag ran toward a ricefield and were subsequently cornered. Their companions ran toward a forested area and escaped.

The prosecution said the two suspects confessed to the incident, but the latter later contested this.

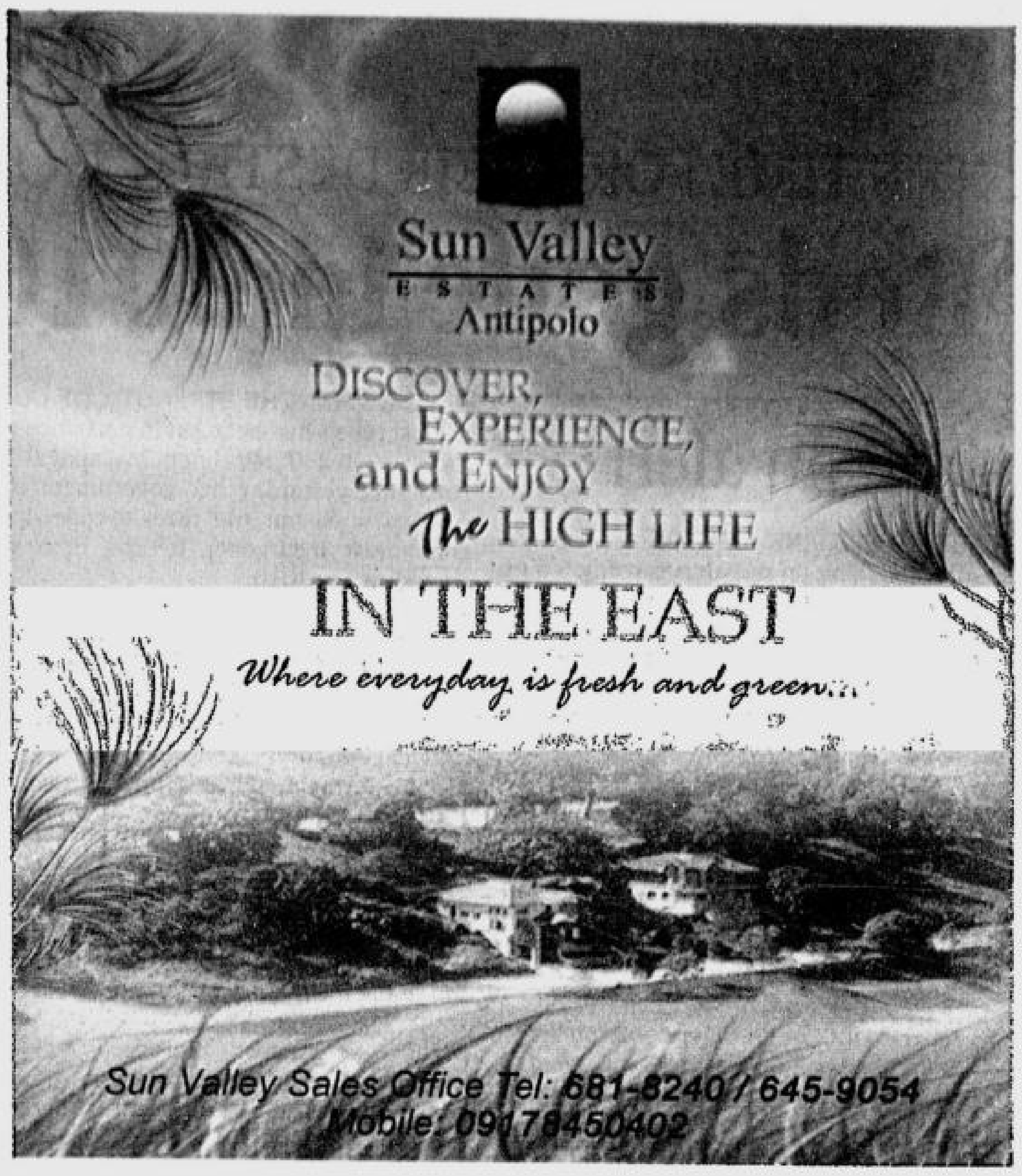
Bulasag claimed he was in a passenger jeepney bound for Manila from San Pablo, Laguna when police stopped and searched the vehicle in Teresa, Rizal. He said he and the other passengers got out and he ran, but the police gave chase and arrested him.

He also said the police tortured him into confessing his involvement in the killing of Sayarot, Fuentes and Seña. He said he signed his supposed confession without reading it, and that his lawyer did not advise him of his constitutional rights.

Librea, for his part, said he, too was in a passenger jeep in Teresa when police stopped the vehicle as part of the investigation into the shooting incident.

Like Bulasag, he also claimed that the police tortured him to admit his involvement in the crime and was made to sign a prepared statement without reading it. He added that he only met Bulasag in jail.

In upholding their convictions, the appellate court said the suspects failed to back up their claim that they signed their affidavits without reading their contents, and were threatened with harm if they would not do so.



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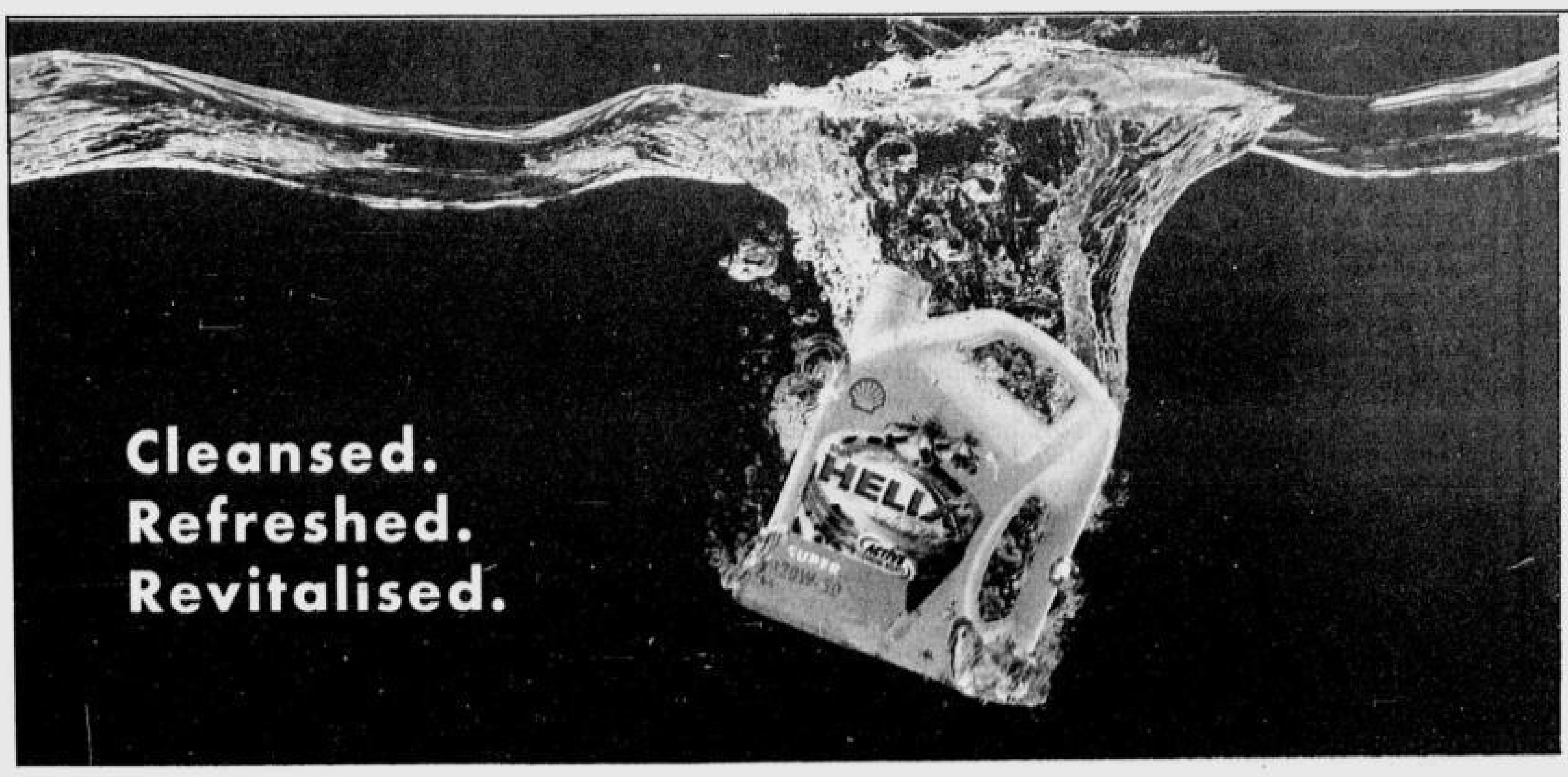

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'IT'S TIME FOR THEIR DESTRUCTION'

Reds gone in 2010–GMA

SAYING THAT THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNIST rebels had been cut in half since she took over in 2001, President Macapagal-Arroyo said yesterday her government was sure to wipe out the three-decades-long communist insurgency by the time she steps down in 2010.

Speaking at the 72nd founding anniversary of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Ms Arroyo reiterated the need to put a stop to the "ideological nonsense and criminal acts" of the communist New People's Army.

"The communist rebels have spent years as a low-level threat ... it is time for their destruction."

Ms Arroyo said rebel strength was down to 6,000 from 7,100 a year ago; half of the 12,000 they were in 2001 when she came to power.

"At the rate we are going, we will put an end to the insurgency by 2010," Ms Arroyo said.

The communist insurgency was launched in 1968 and has long been considered the country's main security threat.

Earlier this month, the rebels rejected a proposal by the Philippine military for a three-year ceasefire and vowed to mount more attacks even as government forces observed a unilateral three-week Christmas truce.

Ms Arroyo also called on the military to continue its offensive against the Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic extremist group active in Mindanao that reportedly has links to the al-Qaida terror network of Osama bin Laden.

"We will allow no quarter to terrorists who are the most reprehensible violators of human rights," said Arroyo, whose government is under fire for a spate of extrajudicial killings of dissidents.

At the same time, the President expressed hope the government would still be able to bring peace in Muslim Mindanao despite the pullout of the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from Malaysian-brokered peace talks.

The talks stalled on the issue of ancestral domain after the government insisted that any agreement on territorial boundaries would have to be approved by the Philippine Congress.

Despite the snag, Ms Arroyo said the government had achieved a great deal in bringing stability in the South, citing the "vast improvement in the region's safety, security and economic growth."

"A peace agreement will bring a new era of economic development to Mindanao," Ms Arroyo told the military. *Christine O. Avendaño, AFP*

PNP on alert

THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE (PNP) is going on red alert starting 6 a.m. today after it decided to give half of its 125,000-strong force a Christmas break.

But PNP Chief Avelino Razon assured that there will be a sufficient force to keep watch against criminals and terrorists this holiday season.

A red or heightened alert means half of the PNP will have to be at their post at all times.

Razon said the other half of the force would get a holiday break after the New Year's Day celebration. *Alcuin Papa*

Correction

IN THE DEC. 21 ISSUE, captions on the front page and on Page A10 misstated that Army Capt. Gerardo Gambala, Lt. Lawrence San Juan and Lt. Ashley Acedillo were among the Magdalo soldiers who were recently granted executive clemency. The three, along with 28 others, have a pending case before the Makati Regional Trial Court.

Villar faces 'coup'

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A MOVE TO UNSEAT SENATE President Manny Villar is quietly gathering steam with administration Senators Edgardo Angara and Richard Gordon confirming what is described as a growing discontent in his consensus-style leadership.

Angara and Gordon have sympathized with the nine members of the Senate minority block who have expressed their dismay over Villar's preference for reaching a consensus rather than engaging in confrontations.

Villar was not immediately available for comment.

Gordon told reporters that several senators had approached him in their effort to oust Villar, but he refused to name them.

He said he was "open" to a change in the Senate leadership noting that Angara, Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile and Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel would make a better replacement.

Angara said Villar's leadership "lacked focus" and that his support team was too slow in the Senate committees.

Angara said that Villar should stick to the priority bills that were listed in the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council instead of spreading the alliance's support over a broad number of bills.

In a press conference, Sen. Jamby Madrigal said that she and five other minority members (Senators Mar Roxas, Loren Legarda, Panfilo Lacson, Rodolfo Biazon, and Benigno Aquino III) met for dinner Thursday night at Red Restaurant at Makati Shangri-La where they talked about rumors of an attempt to oust Villar.

Madrigal said that Villar had proved that he was no "statesman" for being adverse to debate while embracing horse trading.

"Instead of debating an issue, they would just ram through any decision because of their superior numbers," said Madrigal. "We want somebody who can rule from the floor, who will not do backroom deals. There is no transparency now, we have become nothing more than poker players doing shady deals."

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INVITATION TO BID

The Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative, Inc. invites qualified contractors to submit sealed bids for the repair and maintenance of the following generators.

Quantity	Units	Description of works to be done
2	units	Rewinding, re-taping of main stator, main rotor, reconditioning of exciter stator and exciter rotor. Gen set Specs: (1250 KVA/1000KW, 4160 V, three phase, 60 Hz, 900 RPM, 174 Amps). Also include final testing and commissioning in your quotation.

All interested bidders must submit their letter of intents to the INEC BAC Secretariat not later than 10:00 A.M. on December 28, 2007.

Bidding documents will be available at the BAC Secretariat Office on December 28, 2007 – January 8, 2008 upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Five Thousand Pesos (P5,000.00).

A pre-bid conference will be held on January 8, 2008, 1:00, at the INEC Training Room. Submission of sealed bids will be on the following day, January 9, 2008, 10:00 A.M., at the same venue.

(Sgd.) **RODRIGOR R. AGLIAM, REE**
PBAC Chairman

Approved:
(Sgd.) **RENATO A. BALINTEC, PEE**
Officer-in-Charge
(PDI – December 21 & 22, 2007)

TransCo
National Transmission Corporation
Republic of the Philippines

December 17, 2007

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

Supply, Delivery, Installation, Test and Commissioning of One (1) unit Gyro Stabilized UV/Video/Thermal Imaging Powerline Inspection System (ATO-07-45531)

1. The **National Transmission Corporation (TransCo)**, through the Annual Corporate Budget of 2007 intends to apply the sum of **PHILIPPINE PESO THIRTY SEVEN MILLION FOUR HUNDRED EIGHTY ONE THOUSAND PESOS (Php 37,481,000.00)** being the Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) to payment under the contract for the Supply, Delivery, Installation, Test and Commissioning of One (1) Unit Gyro Stabilized UV/Video/Thermal Imaging Powerline Inspection System. **Bids received in excess of the ABC shall be automatically rejected.**
2. TransCo now invites Bids from eligible Bidders for the **Supply, Delivery, Installation, Test and Commissioning of One (1) Unit Gyro Stabilized UV/Video/ Thermal Imaging Powerline Inspection System.** The duration of the contract is **Two Hundred Ten (210) Calendar Days.** The description of an eligible Bidder is contained in Section II of the Bidding Documents, ITB.

   Prospective bidders should have experience in undertaking a similar project within the last fifteen (15) years with an amount of at least 50% of the proposed contract for bidding. The Eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids shall use non-discretionary "pass/fail" criteria. Post-qualification of the lowest calculated bid shall be conducted.
3. Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding procedures using non-discretionary pass/fail criteria as specified in the Implementing Rules and Regulations Part A (IRR-A) of Republic Act 9184 (R.A. 9184), otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act," and is restricted to Filipino citizens/sole proprietorships, organizations with at least sixty percent (60%) interest or outstanding capital stock belonging to citizens of the Philippines, and to citizens or organizations of a country the laws or regulations of which grant similar rights or privileges to Filipino citizens, pursuant to Republic Act 5183 (R.A. 5183) and subject to Commonwealth Act 138 (C.A. 138). Only Bids from Bidders who pass the eligibility check will be opened. The process for the eligibility check is described in Section II of the Bidding Documents, ITB. The bidder with the Lowest Calculated Bid (LCB) shall advance to the post-qualification stage in order to finally determine responsiveness of the bid to technical and financial requirements of the project. The contract shall then be awarded to the Lowest Calculated and Responsive Bidder (LCRB) who was determined as such during the post-qualification procedure.
4. Interested Bidders may obtain further information from **TransCo** and inspect the Bidding Documents at the address given below from **8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.,** during working days starting **December 26, 2007.**
5. A complete set of Bidding Documents may be purchased by Interested Bidders from the address below and upon payment of a non-refundable fee in the amount of **PHP 5,000.00.** The method of payment will be on **cash basis only.** The Bidding Documents shall be received personally by the prospective Bidder or his authorized representative.
6. **TransCo will hold a Pre-Bid Conference** open to all interested parties on **January 15, 2008 at 9:00 A.M.** at the Training Center Building, National Transmission Corporation, Power Center, Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.
7. Bids and eligibility requirements must be delivered to the address below on or before the date and time specified in item 8 below. All Bids must be accompanied by a Bid security in the form and in the amount specified in Clause 22, Section III, Bid Data Sheet of the Bidding documents or an equivalent amount in a freely convertible currency. **Late Bids shall not be accepted.**
8. **Bid opening** shall be on **January 30, 2008 at 9:00 A.M.** at the Training Center Building, National Transmission Corporation, Power Center, Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.
9. Bids will be opened in the presence of the Bidders' representatives who choose to attend at the said address.
10. The bidding is also open to foreign bidders with eligibility requirements described in Clause 3 above and in the Bidding Documents.
11. **TransCo** reserves the right to accept or reject any Bid, to annul the bidding process, and to reject all Bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected Bidder or Bidders.

Mr. R. D. NABONG
Manager, Bids & Contracts Management Department
Ground Floor, Power Center
National Transmission Corporation
Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road
1104 Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
Telephone No. (632) 981-2212; 981-2213; 921-23-08
Fax No.: (632) 921-23-08
Website: **http://www.transco.ph**

(Sgd.) **ATTY. NOEL Z. DE LEON**
Chairman, Bids & Awards Committee

(PDI – December 22, 2007)

NETWORK WAR

Nielsen stands by TV rating

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

TELEVISION RATINGS FIRM AGB Nielsen Media Research is standing by the accuracy of its TV survey results, saying there is no basis for ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.'s demand for it to stop distributing the ratings data.

"There is no basis for it. The data is accurate and reliable. Its accuracy has been checked and confirmed by globally accepted statistical practices and standards. There is no danger that the data will unfairly or inaccurately represent the viewing habits of our subject TV audiences," AGB Nielsen general manager Maya Reforma said in a statement yesterday.

Reforma also said AGB Nielsen would fully comply with the 20-day temporary restraining order (TRO) issued by the Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 80 which was based on a complaint filed by ABS-CBN against the media agency.

"We will fully comply as we cooperate with the court to enable it to come to a just resolution of this case," Reforma said in a statement.

ABS-CBN secured the TRO on Thursday, preventing research agency AGB Nielsen Media Research (Philippines) Inc. from gathering and releasing data on TV ratings due to the alleged corrupted home panels.

ABS-CBN, however, yesterday accused AGB Nielsen of violating the TRO and said it would file contempt charges against the media agency next week.

"We are extremely disappointed with the decision of AGB Nielsen to disobey the clear terms of the TRO. They made a narrow and self-serving interpretation of the TRO. AGB in violation of the TRO provision released ratings data to ABS-CBN Thursday and to all other subscribers, when they were supposed to stop that," ABS-CBN said.

But Reforma noted that the TRO issued by the court pertained to data gathered from allegedly corrupted home panels, and not the totality of its data.

AGB Nielsen also said that based on its own exhaustive investigations, the alleged tampering was confined to certain "home panels" in Bacolod City.

But AGB Nielsen said the alleged attempts to tamper with its data had no effect on its TV survey results.

Reforma told the court that the company had "reprocessed" its data by excluding the panel homes in Bacolod, compared the new data with the original and found that the alleged tampering activities had no effect on the results.

ABS-CBN had alleged that some families that participated in the AGB surveys were contacted by a rival network through house-to-house promotional campaigns offering cash prizes and promotional items, thus, rendering AGB data unreliable.

It presented to AGB Nielsen a videotape of an informant who claimed that certain Bacolod "panel homes" or homes installed with the measuring devices called "Peoplemeters," have been identified by the "rival firm."

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Saturday, December 22, 2007
3rd Week of Advent

1st Reading: 1 S 1:24-28
Gospel: Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit exults in God my savior!

He has looked upon his servant in her lowliness, and people forever will call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me, Holy is his Name!

From age to age his mercy extends to those who live in his presence.

He has acted with power and done wonders, and scattered the proud with their plans.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up those who are downtrodden.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

He held out his hand to Israel, his servant, for he remembered his mercy, even as he promised our fathers,

Abraham and his descendants forever."

Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.

Commentary

Anna (Hannah) brings Samuel with her to the temple and gives him back to the God who gave him to her for this short period of time (until he was weaned, maybe five years old at most). He is dedicated to the Lord. This is how it is with John/Elizabeth and with Jesus/Mary. The child is not hers but belongs and is dedicated to the Lord. And so Mary sings (as once Hannah did in gratitude and joy) of the glory of God and what God has done for her and for her people. But she sings too of what God will continue to do for the people in this child to be born who will scatter the proud in their arrogance, pull down the mighty warriors from their positions, raise the lowly (nonviolent), send the rich away as empty handed as their hearts, and fill the poor with good things—food, justice, hope. They are all part of the remnant that clings to God's word and believes in God's promises, though they may seem to take so long to come true. Will God's promises come through in our lives, our hearts, and our world this year? Will we align ourselves with the Word and the will of God?

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18 RP workers rescued as Nigerian rebs attack

NIGERIA—NIGERIAN GUNMEN attacked an oil industry barge, a jetty and a government building on Wednesday, briefly capturing 18 Filipino crew and fighting with troops, officials said on Thursday.

Violence has been on the increase for the past month in the Niger Delta, where about 2.1 million barrels of crude are pumped every day. Armed rebels say they are losing patience with peace talks launched in June by Nigeria's new government.

Wednesday's fighting occurred in and around Okrika, a riverine community in Rivers state which is the stronghold of a powerful local militia led by Ateke Tom.

Local newspapers quoted sources from Tom's gang as saying the attacks were in retaliation for an Army incursion into Okrika on Dec. 10, but this could not be confirmed.

Officials said the gunmen had been trying to hijack an oil industry barge when troops opened fire, causing them to flee in their speedboats.

Army spokesperson Sagir Musa said the Filipino crew were safe.

"The 18 Filipinos were rescued by our men after the militants blew up the vessel with dynamite. They were handed over to Rivers state government," Musa said.

The gunmen then set fire to a jetty operated by the state oil company, before attacking the Okrika local government headquarters. Musa said a man and a woman were killed in the crossfire and the gunmen torched several vehicles, but no troops or attackers were killed.

Armed rebels in the delta demand greater local access to oil revenues, an end to what they see as neglect of their impoverished communities, compensation from oil companies for oil spills and gas flares, and greater political autonomy.

A wave of attacks on the industry and abductions of foreign oil workers in early 2006 forced the closure of about a fifth of Nigerian output, contributing to the rise of oil prices on world markets. Since then there has been sporadic violence.

But crime and militancy are intertwined in the delta, where armed groups make big money from ransoms, smuggling stolen crude and gun-running, often with the complicity of corrupt government officials. Many gangs have used the political struggle as a pretext to carry out crimes for profit. *Reuters*

'Noche buena' behind bars

By Alcuin Papa

FOR SEN. ANTONIO TRILLANES, BRIG. Gen. Danilo Lim and 12 others detained in connection with the Manila Peninsula Hotel standoff on Nov. 29, there will be no noche buena with their families on Christmas eve.

Director General Avelino Razon of the Philippine National Police said yesterday that security arrangements for Trillanes and his group at the Camp Crame Detention Center remained unchanged for the holidays. Regular visiting hours are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"Our security requirements for Camp Crame will still be high because these are high-risk prisoners," the PNP chief said.

Razon said relatives and lawyers would be allowed to see the group on Christmas during the regular hours, but political allies would be let into the camp "on a case-to-case basis."

Trillanes, 36, a former Navy lieutenant, Lim, 52, a ex-commandant of a Scout Ranger regiment, led a walkout during a court hearing of the 2003 Oakwood mutiny at the Makati City Hall and march on the Peninsula, demanding the resignation of President Mapagal-Arroyo.

Lim, who is detained for the aborted February 2006 coup attempt, was then a witness for the defense in the Oakwood trial.

Police fired tear gas and used an armored personnel carrier to force their way inside the Peninsula, ending the standoff after seven hours.

Charges of rebellion were filed against around 40 people, but a Makati City court ordered the release of most of the detainees, citing insufficient evidence. Only Trillanes, Lim and the 11 are left detained.

PCGG execs deny Philcomsat payoffs

By Daxim L. Lucas

OFFICIALS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL Commission on Good Government (PCGG) yesterday denied having received payoffs from directors nominated to the board of the sequestered Philcomsat group of companies.

In a telephone interview, PCGG Commissioner Ricardo Abcede dared Philcomsat president and CEO Erlinda I. Bildner to back up her allegations of "massive" pay offs by subsidiary Philcomsat Holdings Corp. (PHC) to government officials.

"I don't know where she's getting all this," Abcede said. "This is libelous. She'd better be able to present proof."

"I have never received payments form PHC," he added.

Bildner earlier claimed that PHC spent over P20 million to bribe government officials and members of the judiciary from 2004 to 2005.

The Philcomsat chief said the money was booked through a public relations fund and issued out to their beneficiaries in checks payable to cash, alleging that company records also showed cheque payments of P100,000 for Abcede and P50,000 for PCGG legal chief Jay Miguel in June 2007.

In a text message to the INQUIRER, Miguel also denied receiving any such payment from PHC.

Abcede used to exercise oversight function over the Philcomsat group until the middle of this year when Malacañang put the entire PCGG under the supervision of the Justice Department.

Bildner's revelation after her group seized control of PHC's office at the Pacific Star building in Makati City after a tense standoff with security guards employed by a rival faction.

This rival group is composed of competing shareholders and director nominated by the PCGG to the board of the sequestered company in recent years.

Bildner said that an official of the Office of the Solicitor General also benefited from the payoff.

Philcomsat and POTC were sequestered in the 1980s from business allies of the late President Marcos. The government and its private shareholders subsequently entered into a compromise agreement, although control for the group continued to swing back and forth between directors appointed by the PCGG and Bildner's group which accuses the former of dissipating the company's assets.

Also yesterday, the lawyer of the PHC, Pitero Reig, insisted that the subsidiary's finances were well managed and have prospered under the stewardship of the government-led Locsin-Poblador group.

Reig, in a press statement, also said that the allegations of the Africa-Bildner group against the PHC board for alleged financial mismanagement and illegal disbursement of funds were baseless.

'Secret accounts'

"All the funds of PHC are accounted for. As already explained to the stockholders, there was an investment in a call center, which is now doing very well and is very profitable. There are no 'secret accounts' and funds are moved and placed where they earn the most, which explains fluctuations in the funds in some accounts," he said.

The Locsin-Poblador group's lawyer also decried the smear tactics employed by its rivals, especially on the housing loan obtained by director Enrique Locsin from the company. He said that the transaction was completely above board.

"The loans of Locsin, which include the housing loan with 6-percent interest per annum, a benefit available to the company's officers and employees, are already fully paid. The company actually earned more in loaning the money to Locsin than placing it in the money market, which only gave at most a 4.5 percent interest at that time," Reig said.

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO shares a laugh with pardoned grandma Adang Adjsani in Malacañang. LYN RILLON

HOLIDAY CLEMENCY

Grandma, 73, wins freedom

By Michael Lim Ubac

A TEARY-EYED 73-YEAR-OLD WOMAN regained her freedom yesterday after President Macapagal-Arroyo granted her unconditional pardon.

A Tausug, Adang Adjsani has 14 children with husband, Wahab Hamjin, to come home to during the long holidays, said Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez.

Adjsani is the only female convict who was granted executive clemency this year.

"*Nag-iisang lola* (The only grandmother)," a beaming President Arroyo told reporters after meeting Adjsani at the Heroes Hall in Malacañang at 1:30 p.m.

The elderly woman broke into tears when she saw President Arroyo who promptly told her to "lead a normal life and refrain from engaging in activities which resulted in her incarceration."

"She said yes," recalled the justice chief.

Adjsani begged off from being interviewed by reporters.

In the spirit of Christmas, President Arroyo welcomed to Malacañang 42 of the elderly inmates she pardoned on Wednesday in consideration of their advanced age.

Ms Arroyo has made it a policy to pardon inmates 70-year-old and above whose sentences have become final.

A native of Jolo, Sulu, Adjsani became the 65th elderly inmate to be pardoned by Ms Arroyo for health and age reasons this month, Adjsani was imprisoned six years ago for drug trafficking after she was caught selling shabu, or methamphetamine hydrochloride. She later applied for executive clemency.

Aside from her advanced age, "she's sickly," said Gonzalez, citing the reasons considered by the Bureau of Pardons and Parole in recommending her release.

"She's 73 years old. She may be more than that because she said she does not want to count (her age anymore)."

Eight more convicted elderly women languishing at the Correctional Institute for Women have applied for clemency, but their cases are still awaiting final resolution.

The latest batch of pardoned prisoners brings to 259, including Adjsani, the total number of pardoned prisoners since January 2007.

Of the 259 released inmates, 138 were granted pardon by reason of old age (70 years or above), 48 because of serious medical condition and 73 upon the recommendation of the Board of Pardons and Parole.

Of the convicts pardoned this year, four are above 80 years old and one is 91.

The pardoned inmates dropped by Thursday afternoon to "thank the President for giving them a second chance," said Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye.

They were given P6,000 as "pocket money," said Bunye, stressing that when Ms Arroyo signed the release orders she highlighted the fact that these "elderly prisoners are people, too."

"She hopes that society would welcome them back and give them opportunity to lead useful lives," said Bunye, recalling the President's words when she granted full pardon to the inmates.

Bunye said another elderly woman could be freed today.

Another 10 cases are being processed and may be decided on or before Christmas Day, he said.

The executive clemency extended by the President also covered inmates in other penal institutions who have been recommended for pardon.

Batasan blast case now in court

THE CASE FILED against the suspects in the Nov. 13 Batasan blast, which killed six people, finally landed in court following a second raffle held at the Quezon City hall of justice.

The first judge on whose lap the multiple murder and multiple murder charges filed against suspects Caidar Aunal, Adham Kusain, and Ikram Indama was raffled off, inhibited herself from hearing the case.

Quezon City Regional Trial Court branch 80 judge Charito Gonzales immediately withdrew from handling the case as soon as it was dealt to her by the draw. Her reason for inhibiting from the case was not divulged.

Her inhibition from the case was accepted by the executive judge who subsequently ordered the re-raffle.

Yesterday, the records of criminal case Q-07-149982 were brought to the sala of Regional Trial Court branch 83 Judge Ralph Lee.

Aunal, Kusain, and Indama have been charged with the bombing of the Batasan Pambansa south wing, where six persons including Basilan Rep. Wahab Akbar, died.

Jeannette I. Andrade

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55 Sumilao farmers flying home

From page A1

new phase in their struggle.

"They are going back trusting that the government will fulfill its promise this time around. They also trust that the Church will continue to follow up this case," Pabillo said.

The farmers, all of the Higaonon tribe, will be reunited with their loved ones and comrades after a two-month absence.

"Because it's Christmas, we also want to be with our families," said one. "But this is not the end of our struggle because our victory is not yet complete. It will be complete when we finally till our own land and make it productive."

Pack-up time

At around 4 p.m., the farmers began packing their belongings and dismantling their makeshift camp in front of the Department of Agrarian Reform central office in Quezon City.

They were assisted by their supporters from the Jesuit sociopolitical ministry Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB) and the militant group Akbayan.

At around 6 p.m., they boarded two air-conditioned buses offered by the Hospicio de San Jose and Sta. Isabel College.

A number of the farmers who complained of dizziness because they were unaccustomed to air-conditioning were loaded into an ordinary bus of the La Concordia College and a jeepney.

The farmers were to spend the night in a dormitory at the Ateneo de Manila University where the SLB is based, said Arlene Bag-ao, one of their lawyers who accompanied them in their 2-month walk.

A Mass for the farmers was to be celebrated last night by Fr. Daniel Huang SJ, the Jesuit provincial in the Philippines.

Today, the farmers will have "debriefing" sessions and other meetings to reflect on past events and plan their next moves, Bag-ao said.

2 fronts

Pabillo said the Church had accepted the challenge to serve as the farmers' voice in Manila. He said the farmers' fight would now be waged on two fronts—in Manila and in Bukidnon.

In a symbolic act, the farmers turned over to Pabillo a weather-worn cloth banner that summed up the purpose of their long walk: "Reclaim the 144-hectare land."

According to Pabillo, Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales wrote a letter to Ms Arroyo appealing again on the farmers' behalf for a cease-and-desist order on the construction of a hog farm on the disputed property by current landowner San Miguel Foods Inc. (SMFI).

Pabillo said the letter was handed to Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita yesterday morning.

Rosales and CBCP president Angel Lagdameo had earlier directed the CBCP's social action arm, the National Secretariat for Social Action (Nassa) to form a task force to monitor the implementation of Ms Arroyo's executive order on the Sumilao case. Pabillo heads the CBCP-Nassa.

Ms Arroyo's order reclassifies the property from agro-industrial to agricultural use, paving the way for its reversion to the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

Settlement talks

Pabillo said some Church representatives had begun talks with SMFI officials in an effort to arrange a settlement based on kindness and compassion.

"We hope something good will result from friendship, not hardened positions," he said.

At the same time, he said, the Church had heard unconfirmed reports that Malacañang was trying to work out an out-of-court resolution with SMFI.

Pabillo said the Church was appealing to the government to stand by its decision to give the land back to the Sumilao farmers.

He said the farmers were feeling that the implementation of Ms Arroyo's order was taking a long time.

Pabillo said Malacañang could very well issue the cease-and-desist order as well as a notice of CARP coverage if it wanted to, based on its reclassification of the disputed property.

He expressed the Church's hope that Malacañang would do away with the 15 days it had set to allow for any SMFI appeal so that the DAR could start the process of installing the farmers on the land.

3rd stage

Napoleon Merida Jr., one of the farmers' leaders, said he and his comrades were now embarking on the "third stage" of their struggle for the land.

The first stage was the farmers' hunger strike in 1997, and the second, their two-month march from Sumilao to Manila.

"Our trust in Malacañang is great, After our talks [with Ms Arroyo], we agreed that the land should go to us, even if this was not written in the order," Merida said.

"The Catholic Church has taken our cause as its own, so we will be returning to Sumilao to continue our fight there. The Church will make sure for us that the notice of coverage is issued, and we will be waiting for it in Sumilao," he said.

Another farmer, 55-year-old Linda Ligmon, told the INQUIRER: "I believe in the President, but I would have been more of a believer if the cease-and-desist order and notice of CARP coverage were issued before our return. We are sad because when we get there, the construction of the hog farm would still be continuing. It's so heartbreaking because our house is just beside the property and we see the violations continuing every day."

Homesick

Merida, however, admitted that many of the other farmers were also homesick and wanted to be with their families on Christmas.

But he stressed that this was not their main motivation in deciding to return.

"We have high hopes in the Church's planned 'heart-to-heart' talk with the San Miguel executives. We're confident the Church will convince San Miguel to give us back our land," he said.

Merida said the farmers had also accepted "as a sign of [their] faith in the President" the C-130 she offered to transport them to Cagayan de Oro City on Sunday morning, so that they could make an early return to their homes in Barangay San Vicente in Sumilao.

"Our struggle will continue as long as we don't get our land. But it will remain peaceful. Personally, I'm willing to march back to Manila if we are failed again," he said.

Merida's sister, 21-year-old Bajicjic, said she was also "not very happy" to return to Sumilao without solid assurance that the land had been returned to the farmers.

"I'm excited to return, but not that much. Our town mates, especially those who misunderstand our fight, might tease us and say that our march resulted in nothing. But I'll tell them we are confident that we will win because of the President's promise and the Church support," she said.

Parting gifts

As parting gifts to their supporters, the farmers turned over a number of the cloth streamers that they carried during their 1,700-km walk.

One calling for the revocation of the conversion of the disputed property to agro-industrial use was left at the College of the Holy Spirit in Manila, where they stayed while their leaders, lawyers and supporters met with the President.

A second calling for the restoration of the farmers' dignity was left with Cardinal Rosales, a former bishop of Malaybalay in Bukidnon.

A third bearing their claim to the land was given to CBCP-Nassa's Pabillo.

A fourth bearing the slogan "Renew and Extend CARP" was presented to Akbayan Rep. Risa Hontiveros, who visited the camp yesterday.

A fifth was to be left at the Ateneo.

Hontiveros, who addressed the farmers using a megaphone, said she and her colleagues in Congress would speed up the passage of the bill extending the CARP, funding for which is due to expire in June 2008.

She said all the loopholes of the CARP Law would be plugged so that what happened to the Sumilao farmers would not be repeated again on other farmers.

"But the target we shall be working on is that the notice of coverage will be issued before June 2008 so that whether or not the CARP is renewed, you will already be installed on your land and have the land titles," Hontiveros told the farmers.

Tribal ritual

While the farmers packed their belongings and dismantled their makeshift tents, two of their chieftains, dressed in red and blue jackets, performed a tribal religious ritual called the "*panglitub.*"

Four young chickens were sacrificed while the chieftains, praying in the Higaonon's native Binukid language, invoked the spirits of their ancestors and of their land in Sumilao.

Philippines
R C A M
ARCHDIOCESE OF MANILA
SUPPORTS SUMILAO FARMERS

PROTESTING farmers from Sumilao, Bukidnon, take a break at Luneta.

REM ZAMORA

GMA, SMC head talking, says Gonzalez

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-Arroyo and the president of San Miguel Corp., parent company of San Miguel Foods Inc., have been holding talks on the land dispute in Sumilao, Bukidnon, according to Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez.

But Gonzalez said he did not know of the developments in the talks between Ms Arroyo and SMC president Ramon Ang. He said he was "not part of the negotiating group."

"What I know is that San Miguel, through Mr. Ang, assured the President that they will help resolve this problem. How they will do that, definitely it will have to go through the use [and] ownership of the property there," Gonzalez told reporters yesterday in Malacañang.

Asked whether this meant that SMC was ready to give up the property, Gonzalez merely said he did not know "what kind of assistance they're offering" in resolving the matter.

But in a text message to the INQUIRER, Ang said: "There was no meeting with Malacañang. San Miguel is still waiting for the copy of the executive order."

Asked whether SMFI was likely to dispute the executive order issued by Ms Arroyo on Dec. 18, Ang merely said the company was waiting for an official copy of the document before issuing a statement on the issue. *Reports from Christine O. Avendaño and Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson*

Agri federation backs farmers on land claim

From page A1

ing Fr. Joaquin Bernas, dean emeritus of the Ateneo Law School, and Christian Monsod, a former chair of the Commission on Elections.

"No court or lawyer has contradicted the ruling," he added.

Ordoñez was reacting to the remarks on Thursday of Jesus Arranza, president of the Federation of Philippine Industries, who said the Palace ruling "sends the wrong signal" to would-be investors.

"The rule of law should prevail, not emotions," Arranza had said, adding that with the ruling, the local government of Sumilao would no longer earn up to P98 million in taxes from the development project of current landowner San Miguel Foods Inc. (SMFI), and would lose opportunities from some 2,800 expected jobs.

Agro-industrial plan

Ordoñez said that when the Supreme Court awarded the Sumilao property to Norberto Quisumbing in 1999, one of the conditions was that a specific agro-industrial plan should be completed within five years.

In 2002, Quisumbing sold the property to SMFI without implementing a plan.

When the five-year deadline expired in 2004, neither Quisumbing nor SMFI had put up a specific agro-industrial plan.

By then, Ordoñez said, the land should have automatically reverted back to the farmers, but it did not.

He said that with the Palace ruling, "we showed investors that we have enforced the rule of law, thus sending them the correct signal."

"It could even mean more business for our country," Ordoñez said.

More importantly, the ruling is a just order that treats the farmers fairly, he said.

The executive order issued by Ms Arroyo on Dec. 18 revokes the land-use conversion order on the property. The reclassification of the land from agro-industrial to agricultural use will allow it to be reverted to the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

Legitimacy

On the question of the claimants' legitimacy, Ordoñez said the Sumilao farmers were willing to be screened to ensure that they were the rightful landowners.

Alyansa Agrikultura vice president Vic Fabe had earlier called for the formation of an independent panel to guarantee that only legitimate claimants would benefit from the distribution of the land.

Ordoñez said that after the land distribution, the Sumilao farmers and SMFI could form a mutually beneficial partnership.

In a commentary published in the INQUIRER on Friday, Ordoñez said: "A successful alternative model is when a private firm provides support services, together with world-class technology, economies of scale and access to profitable markets."

He cited as an example the partnership between the multinational firm Dole and the agrarian reform beneficiary, where the farmer retains land ownership and uses Dole's support services to the advantage of all concerned.

In that partnership, he said, farmer incomes were at P15,000 a month, more than four times what they might have earned had they done things on their own.

'Amparo' granted to kin of 2 activists

From page A1

the petition for a writ of amparo, a measure adopted in October by the Supreme Court amid a surge of extrajudicial executions under the Arroyo administration.

Camp inspection

The petitioners also asked the court to issue an order, if military custody of the two is denied, to allow them to inspect the places where the victims are believed to have been taken, including military camps, detachments, patrol bases and safe houses.

Also named respondents were National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr., Philippine Army 3rd Infantry Division commander Maj. Gen. Jovenal Narcise, AFP 32nd Civil Relations Unit chief Capt. Lowen Gil Marquez, Col. Mariano Perez, and a certain Major Galanza of the Military Intelligence Group.

The petitioners also sought the writ against Chief Supt. Wilfredo Dulay Sr., Western Visayas police director, as well as Insp. Vicente Castor Jr. and Insp. Alexander Rodrigo, police chiefs of Oton and Janiuay towns in Iloilo, respectively.

Heavily armed men on board at least two vehicles took Arado and Dominado in Barangay Cabanbanan in Oton town in Iloilo on April 12 after the victims' vehicle was ambushed.

Their companion, human rights worker Jose Ely Garachico, was shot and seriously wounded but was left behind.

The victims' vehicle was burned later in a sugarcane field in Barangay Guadalupe in Janiuay, around 30 kilometers from where the victims were waylaid.

Summary hearing

In a summary hearing conducted last week, Dulay and Castor submitted their reply to the writ through their legal counsel Ehdel Genese Pereira. None of the military officers named respondents or any representative were present.

Dulay said he and his fellow police officials should not be named among the respondents because they "have not violated or threatened to violate the rights of aggrieved parties."

He said the police had responded to the incident, conducted pursuit and continued to investigate the case.

Dulay said Garachico was "not cooperative" in the investigation, a claim denied by Garachico.

He said the inclusion of President Arroyo and the police officials in the petition was a "classic example of harassment" and a "clear abuse of the writ of amparo."

Aguilar set the next hearing of the case for Jan. 15 next year. He is expected to hear the defense of the respondents and the merits of the petition.

RP can tap 'green' fund in '09

By TJ Burgonio

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES LIKE the Philippines will have to wait until 2009 to access the Adaptation Fund under the Kyoto Protocol, a climate specialist said yesterday.

World leaders agreed to operationalize the long idle fund to help developing countries adapt to global warming at the recently concluded climate change conference in Bali, Indonesia.

Dr. Lourdes Tibig, a member of the Philippine delegation to the summit, said the Philippines could access the fund as early as 2009 once the mechanism has been established.

"The money is already there. It's just not being distributed because there's no mechanism yet," she said in an interview.

Tibig is a supervising weather specialist at the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration's (Pagasa).

At the summit's end last Saturday, world leaders agreed to set 2009 as the deadline for a new treaty to tackle global warming, three years ahead of the expiration of the Kyoto Protocol.

An Adaptation Board, composed of representatives from developing countries, was created to draw up the mechanism on the fund allocation, while the World Bank's Global Environmental Facility was tapped to disburse it.

The fund is financed by a levy on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol. Since 1997, it has grown to $67 million and is seen as a major contributor to adaptation financing for developing countries.

The fund was designed to finance concrete adaptation programs in developing countries that are parties to the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement aimed at cutting down greenhouse gas emissions worldwide.

The CDM is a mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol which helps developed countries achieve their emissions reduction targets, and developing countries attain their sustainable development goals.

Greenpeace Southeast Asia campaigner Jasper Inventor, also a member of the Philippine delegation, however, said that the fund won't come "onstream" until 2012, when the Protocol expires.

"Under the framework, it's still 2012, unless we're able to negotiate a position that we should be able to access this fund after the negotiations," he said in an interview.

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Presyo sa palengke sa Metro Manila.

NUTRI-TIP: Maghain ng one-dish meal, matipid na, masustansiya pa.

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SOURCE: DA-Bureau of Agricultural Statistics

Gov't challenges Mormon priest's rape acquittal

By Leila B. Salaverria

SAYING MINORS CANNOT VALIDly consent to sexual relations with persons in positions of influence or moral ascendancy over them, government lawyers have contested a trial court's acquittal of a Mormon priest for child abuse for having sex with a 17-year-old member of his church.

In a petition filed with the Court of Appeals, the Office of the Solicitor General sought to annul the decision of the Muntinlupa Regional Trial Court that found the accused, Gil Anthony Calianga, not guilty because he and the 17-year-old were sweethearts and their sexual relations were consensual.

The Aug. 27, 2007 RTC decision, penned by Judge Philip Aguinaldo, also ruled that there was not enough evidence to show that Calianga used his power over the complainant, even if he was a priest.

But the OSG contended that all the elements of child abuse were present and the judge committed a gross error.

The OSG pointed to a September 2007 Supreme Court decision upholding the child abuse conviction of a former Assumption College professor for having sexual relations with his minor student.

In that decision, the high court ruled that the sweetheart theory could not be invoked in cases of child prostitution and sexual abuse under the anti-child abuse law or Republic Act 7610.

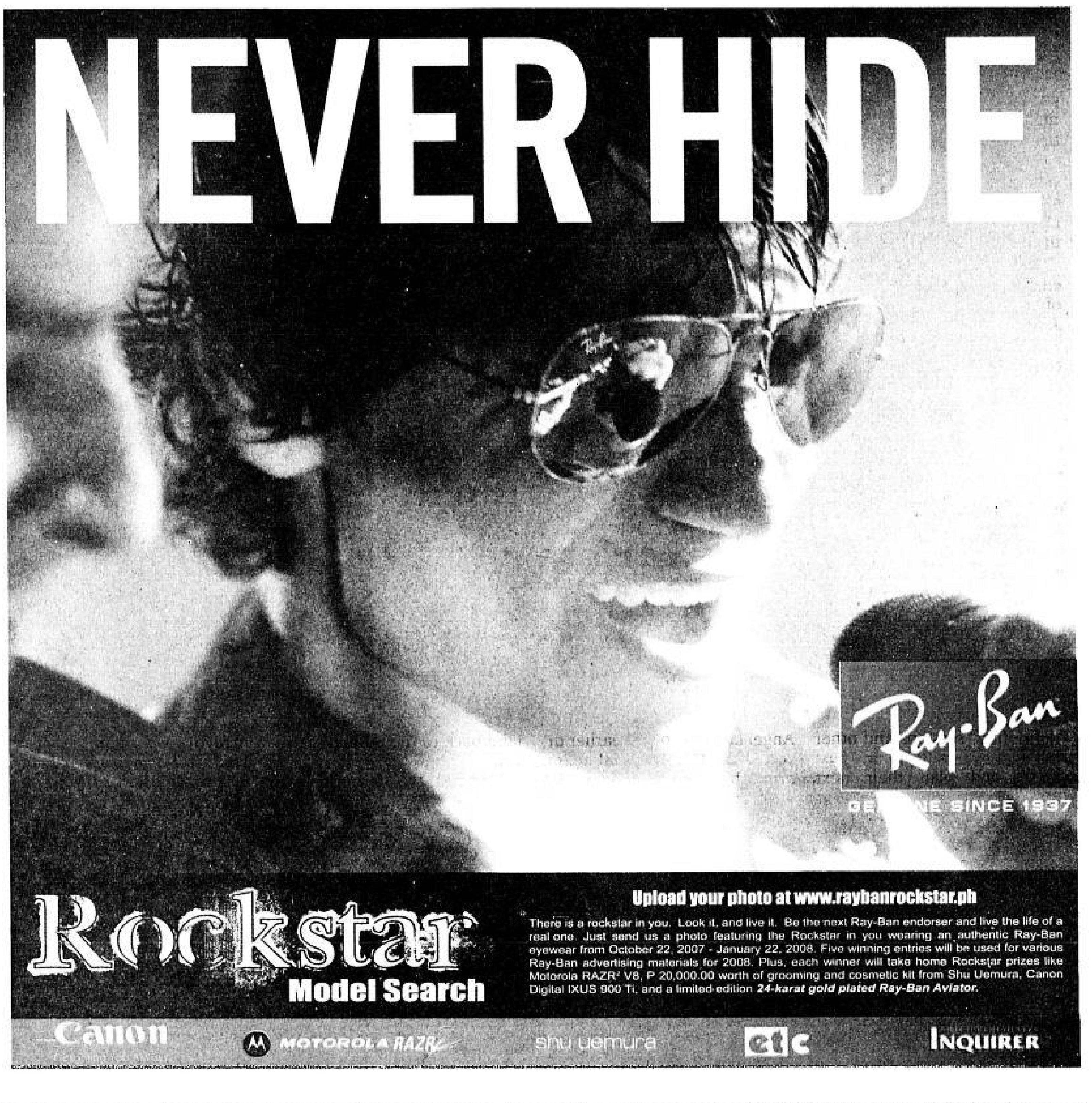
"A child exploited in prostitution or subjected to other sexual abuse cannot validly give consent to sexual intercourse with another person," the high court had said.

Considering that the accused was an elder of the Mormon faith to which the girl used to belong, the girl was deemed to be a "child subjected to other sexual abuse" as a result of Calianga's influence and moral ascendancy," the OSG said in its petition.

Another aggravating circumstance, according to the OSG, was that the girl described her sexual abuse as rape, but the court did not upgrade the charge.

The OSG contended that while acquittals are generally final and unappealable, they are not absolute. Rulings can be voided if the lower court committed grave abuse of discretion that would amount to denial of due process.

In this case, it said, the RTC allowed the accused to present "perjured testimonies and evidence" in violation of the complainant's right to due process, and "blatantly and maliciously" disregarded relevant evidence when it ruled that the suspect had no moral ascendancy or influence over the girl.



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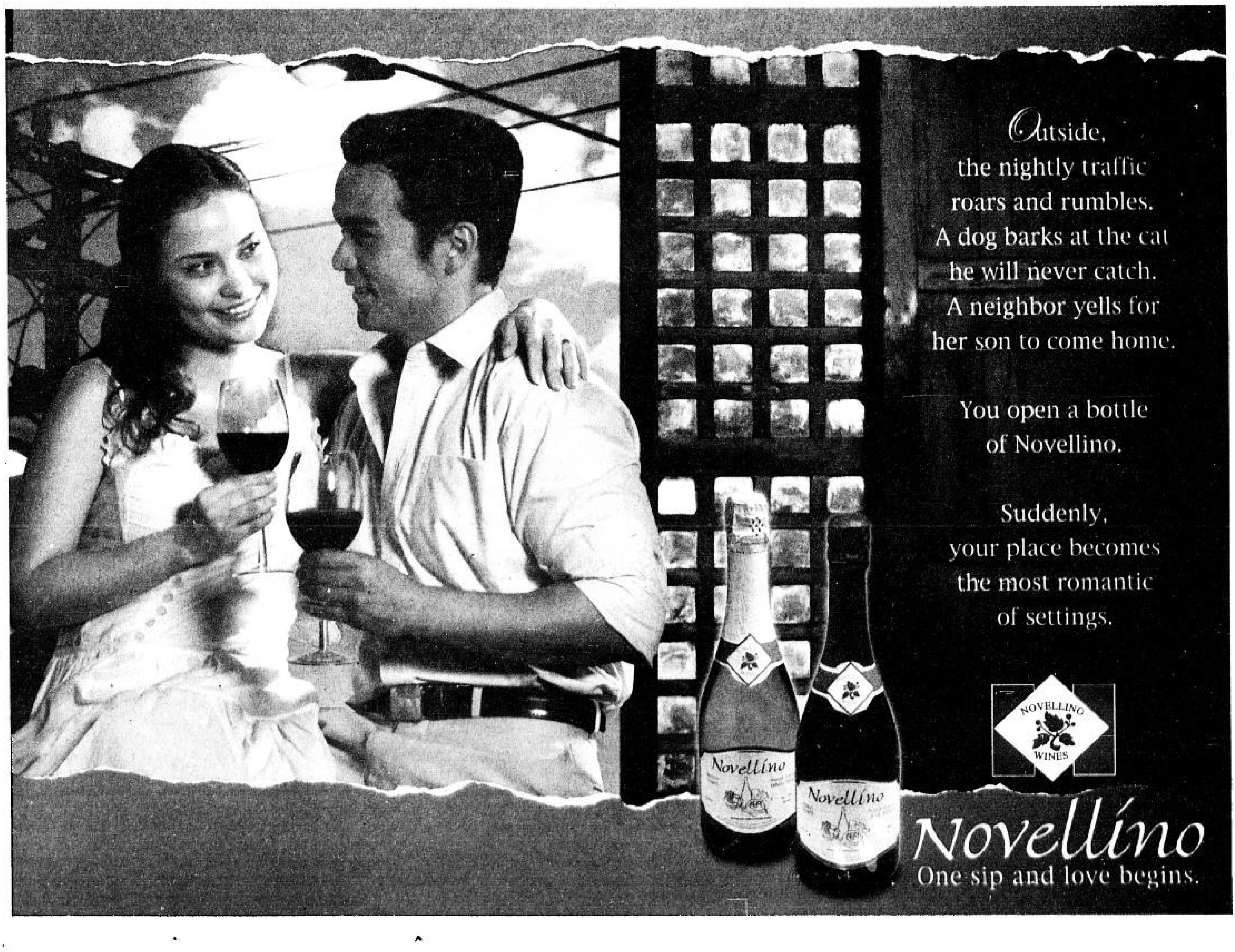

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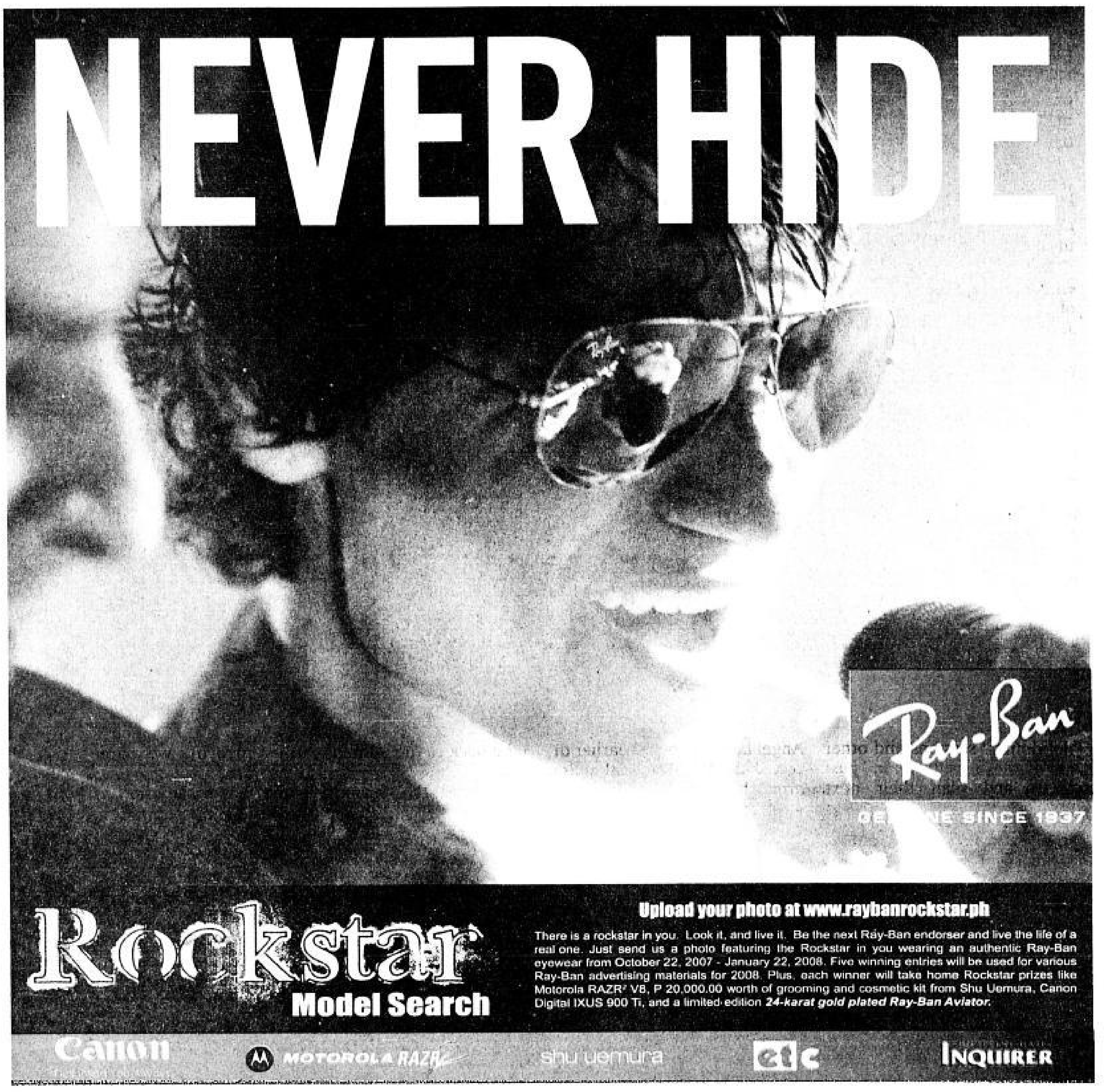

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Canon MOTOROLA RAZR shu uemura etc INQUIRER

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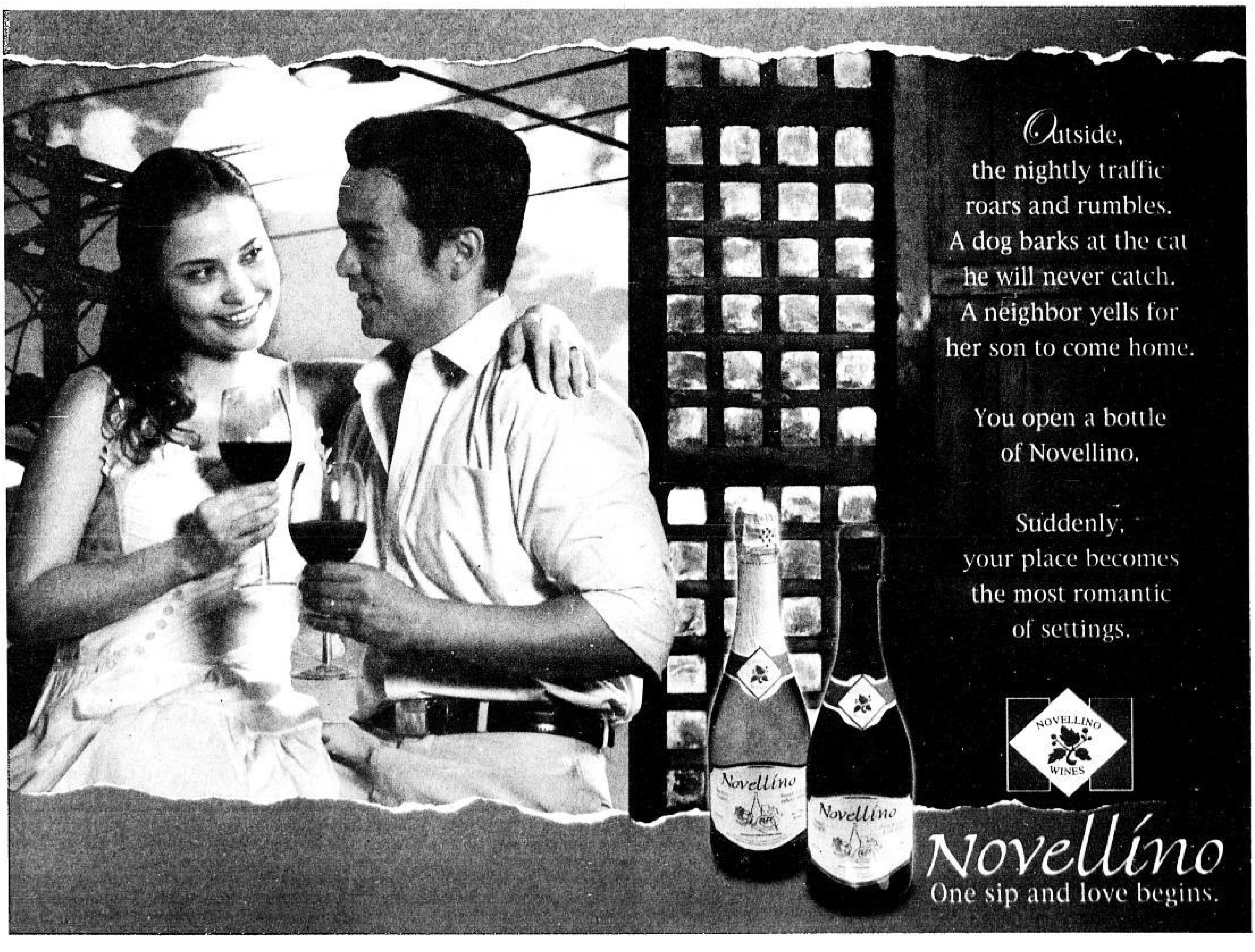

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NOVELLINO WINES

Novellino
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Esperon says Lacson in February coup plot

From page A1

the extension of the AFP chief's term would lead to demoralization in the ranks because of his alleged involvement in the 'Hello Garci' wiretapping scandal purportedly showing Ms Arroyo stole the 2004 election."

"He (Lacson) doesn't like me, what can I do? I won't push myself on him," Esperon said, trying to conceal his irritation.

"But what I can say is, I know the Armed Forces more than he does. General Lacson is angry at anticoup (forces). He's mad at (Marine Brig. Gen. Jonathan) Martir. It must be because I saw his name in a declaration."

Martir was said to have been a major obstacle to the success of the February 2006 power grab that prompted Ms Arroyo to declare a national state of emergency.

Army Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim, then the Scout Ranger Regiment commander, was to call on the military to withdraw support from Ms Arroyo and join a protest march celebrating the anniversary of the Edsa Revolution that ousted the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986.

During the Nov. 29 Peninsula Manila hotel standoff, Martir also led the Marine unit deployed there to quell the rebellion led by Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV, a former Navy lieutenant, and Lim.

Lacson not a threat

Esperon said the "Diamond Statement," reportedly recovered from the "participants" in the February power grab, had "something to do with change of structures and leadership."

He said the statement named a leader who would take over from Ms Arroyo once she was removed from power in "the same way the names of General Lim and Trillanes were mentioned in their statement at the Manila Pen."

Esperon declined to elaborate, but said the AFP and the Department of Justice had already investigated the document.

He did not give, either, details about the investigation, saying the DOJ "was in a better position to answer that."

Esperon said he did not think Lacson, a former director general of the Philippine National Police, was a threat to the government.

He also said there were no indications that Lacson was linked to the Nov. 29 power grab attempt.

"I do not look at it that way. It's probably why they are not succeeding," Esperon said.

Court-martial

Lim, former Marine Commandant Maj. Gen. Renato Miranda, Medal of Valor awardee Col. Ariel Querubin and 25 other ranking and decorated Marine and Scout Ranger officers are facing court-martial in connection with the 2006 incident.

Esperon and Miranda were classmates at the Philippine Military Academy Class '74 and were even bunkmates. Esperon described his mistah, who is detained at an Army stockade in Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal, as his "best friend in the service."

He said his friendship with Miranda "will always be there," but he will always stand firm against military adventurism.

No idea

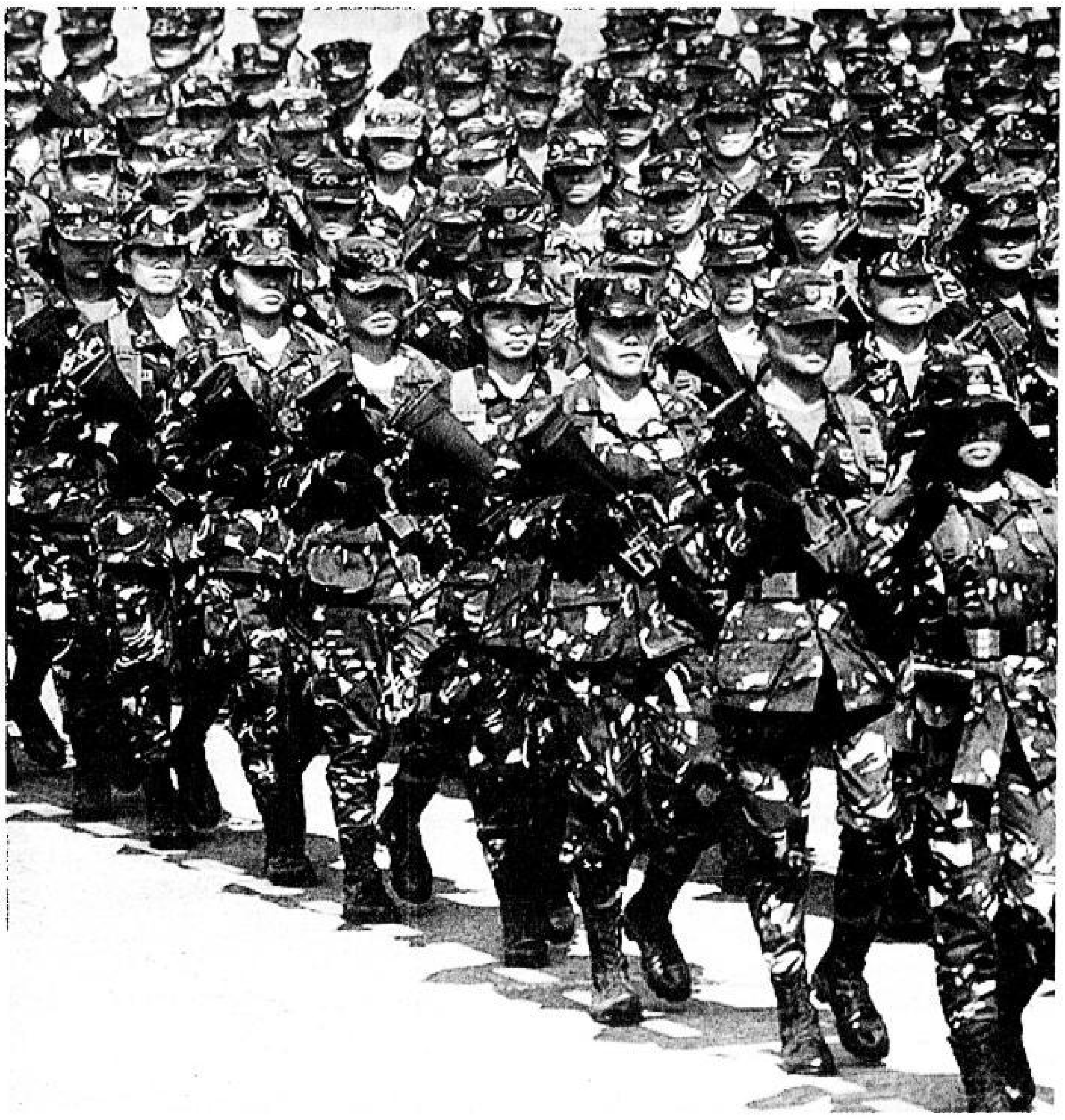
Asked for comment, Lacson said he had no idea what the Diamond Statement was and questioned Esperon's motive for implicating him in the 2006 failed coup only now.

He also denied having taken part in an unconstitutional move to bring down the Arroyo administration.

"It's almost February '08 (Esperon's retirement), so what is his motive in linking me just now to an alleged failed coup using a supposed February '06 document?" he added.

He admitted that he was "silently sympathetic to the cashiered soldiers' cause."

"I deny involvement in any unconstitutional means to topple the government," he said. *With a report from Dona Z. Pazzibugan*



WOMEN soldiers march with their weapons during the 2nd anniversary celebration of the Armed Forces of the Philippines held at Camp Aguinaldo. JOAN BONDOC

Butterflies greet visitors to DENR

From page A1

caught the attention of employees who shooed him away.

Apart from the winged creatures, stick insects and millipedes crawling among live plants in two glass cases may be viewed in the building's main lobby leading to the atrium.

Environment Secretary Lito Atienza and Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI) unveiled the garden and the terrarium on Dec. 17 with the end in view of raising the ecological awareness of the employees and the public.

"I'm trying to create an atmosphere in the DENR that would best picture what we're doing here," Atienza said. "We're protecting the environment. So let's have a DENR that's more representative of what the natural environment is."

On loan

Atienza said the butterfly garden and terrarium were "on loan" from SMI, which is running a copper-gold project in Tampakan, South Cotabato.

Members of the SMI staff in Tampakan are breeding the butterflies (12 species), insects and millipedes as part of the company's effort to "preserve biodiversity" in their forest habitat, the DENR said.

SMI is also planning to develop butterfly and insect breeding as an alternative livelihood for communities in Tampakan.

The Philippines has one of the highest concentrations of butterfly species—a rich variety estimated to range from 895 to 1,674. This is on top of the 890 subspecies found in the different islands, according to the DENR.

The garden is home to the *Papilio daedalus daedalus*, a green butterfly found in north, central and south Philippines; the *Hypolimnas bolina philippensis*, a black butterfly with white spots found all over the country; and *Parthenos sylvia philippensis*, a brown butterfly.

Among the other species that can be seen in the garden are the *Troides rhadamantos*, also known as Golden Birdwing; *Idea leuconoe leuconoe*, known as Siam Tree Nymph; and *Papilio demoleus ibanius*, or Lime Butterfly.

Sight to refresh

The butterfly garden teems with flowering plants laid out on soft ground around a three-tier artificial waterfall that flows into a pond—a sight to refresh in a concrete building.

One wall is covered by three layers of bamboo rising to the open roof to simulate mountain peaks. Sunlight and ventilation flow through the mesh that serves as the roof cover.

But yesterday, only a number remained of the butterflies seen fluttering on Day One. At past noon, a black butterfly was seen perched on a flower, and two others lay dead on the ground. A few others could be seen clinging to the mesh.

Butterflies have a life span of 15 days. Whether they will all survive in this artificial habitat will be seen in the next few days, officials said.

"If they have sufficient food, and they can fly around, they can reproduce," Environmental Management Bureau director Julian Amador told the INQUIRER. "Let's see in the next few days if they will thrive."

The butterflies can thrive if "food plants" are regularly placed in the garden, said Mundita Lim, director of the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau.

The DENR will eventually move the butterfly garden and terrarium to the Ninoy Aquino Parks and Wildlife, which it plans to turn into a "center of biodiversity," one of Atienza's priority projects.

First steps

Atienza, who assumed the post of environment secretary on Aug. 1, said the butterfly garden and terrarium were just the first steps to recreate an atmosphere "conductive to education" in the DENR building.

He also plans to put up a showroom for the Philippines' rich natural resources, such as minerals.

In this way, he said, students visiting the DENR would be able to learn "something new."

ATMs bear brunt of holiday splurge

From page A1

holiday weekend.

Mike Bernabe, ExpressNet vice president for operations, said his ATM network recorded the highest level of withdrawals in its history on Tuesday, Dec. 18, when its cash machines doled out P1.8 billion in funds.

"This is the most we've ever seen," Bernabe said, adding that the level of withdrawals may be linked to the growing spending capacity of Filipinos. "Many of them were probably withdrawing bonuses for their shopping [needs]."

ExpressNet pools the ATM networks of Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), BDO Unibank, HSBC and Land Bank of the Philippines.

On ordinary days, Expressnet services an average of P450 million in cash withdrawals nationwide. Bernabe, however, said the daily demand for cash had doubled this week.

"We expect this to continue this weekend and into the weekend before the new year," he said.

Bernabe said many banks—including those affiliated with other ATM networks—have had trouble finding enough P500 bills to feed into their cash machines.

"The demand for P500 bills is very strong," he said. "This seems to be the most appropriate amount for our clients since P100 bills are too small, while P1,000 bills are too big."

According to Bernabe, the shortage of ATMs belonging to other networks has prompted a huge exodus to ExpressNet's cash machines.

"Everyone knows that BPI is the only bank which restocks its machines [with cash] even on Saturdays and Sundays, so we end up having long lines," he said.

To ease the problem, Bernabe said BPI decided to open 30 bank branches in malls and strategic locations throughout the long weekend to service the needs of their clients.

BPI branches have also extended their banking hours until 5 p.m. during this period. ExpressNet ATM holders would be able to use their cards to withdraw cash over-the-counter at BPI branches.

"We are also sourcing bills internally to meet the needs of our clients," Bernabe said.

Megalink

Bernadette Ramos, Megalink head of sales and promotion, said member banks in her ATM network had committed to making their cash machines operational 96 percent of the time during the holiday season.

"This is the guideline we set for our members to comply with," Ramos said.

"The demand for cash is very high," she said. "Last week and last Saturday, [Megalink] recorded 770,000 transactions [per day] on its network."

The Megalink network usually conducts 420,000 transactions per day.

"Normally, withdrawals peak on the 24th [of December] and taper off from there, then peak again before the new year," Ramos explained.

Like ExpressNet, Megalink member banks are also experiencing a shortage of P500 bills. "We experience this every year so our members know what to do in anticipation of the high demand for cash," she said.

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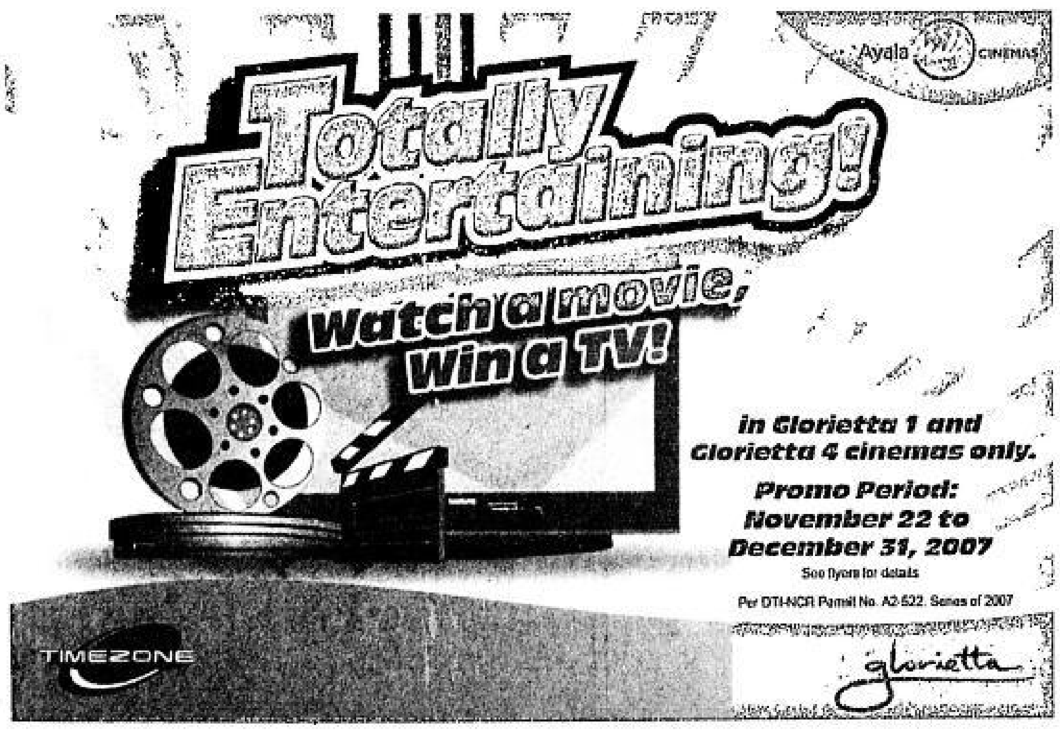

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JV: Only 3, not 7, seized cars are mine

By Kristine L. Alave

SAN JUAN CITY MAYOR JOSEPH Victor "JV" Ejercito yesterday insisted that he was no smuggler and that only three of the suspected smuggled cars that authorities seized in a shop in Makati City belonged to him.

In a statement, Ejercito said he was "surprised" by reports that he owned seven of the confiscated luxury vehicles that were found in Auto Sports 24 Corp. on Chino Roces Avenue on Thursday by the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group (PASG).

"The fact of the matter is, the only vehicles in the list that are connected to me are the BMW 750il model 1991 with Plate No. TLU878, the Range Rover that I was using at that time, and the Ferrari registered under Iñigo Zobel ... The other four vehicles do not belong to me at all," Ejercito explained.

A PASG official has also tagged Ejercito as the owner of a Mercedes Benz 320 (ZFT700), a Mercedes Benz 350 SL (NFT834), a 1956 Thunderbird and a BMW M6 (EJV707).

That the PASG cleared him and allowed him to leave the area after he presented his papers when he arrived at the shop while the raid was underway was proof that his vehicles were all legal, Ejercito said.

On Thursday, Ejercito said only two of the vehicles were his.

Yesterday, the mayor admitted that the Ferrari was given to him as a "gift" by Zobel, who stood as best man in his wedding. However, he noted, the vehicle was still under Zobel's name.

He added that he only recently got hold of the vehicle's registration papers as Zobel had just arrived from abroad. The 12-year-old Ferrari worth P8.7 million has proper documents, he added.

"PASG operatives cleared the vehicle upon seeing that the taxes and customs duties were duly paid for," Ejercito said.

He explained that the Ferrari was brought to the shop to be checked and serviced.

The Ranger was to have its horn fixed, he added.

"I hope that this clarifies the matter and will put an end to my name being dragged into this controversy," he said. *With a report from Michael Lim Ubac*

Gridlock on Edsa

TRAFFIC ALONG THE southbound lane of Edsa ground to a halt early last night ahead of the four-day Christmas break.

The bumper-to-bumper traffic stretched from Kamuning in Quezon City all the way to Magallanes in Makati City.

Officials of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority could not find a suitable explanation for the virtually unmoving flow of vehicles, saying they too found it odd.

"The situation is worse than usual. We can't just say this is caused by the number of Christmas shoppers and partyers," said MMDA traffic operations center chief Angelito Vergel de Dios.

Vergel de Dios said a number of factors could explain the gridlock, aside from the volume of vehicles, such as a stalled steel truck on Nichols Exit near Sales Bridge.

Another possible explanation, Vergel de Dios said, was the practice by many buses of occupying lanes other than the yellow lanes allotted to them, where they were supposed to unload or load passengers.

He took exception to suggestions that the traffic jam was caused by missing traffic enforcers who attended Christmas parties.

"The only ones who are saying that are private vehicle owners on the third lane. They just cannot see our men on the sidewalks," he said. *DJ Yap*

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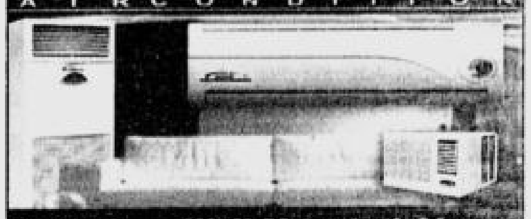

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Seized luxury cars entered Cebu, dealers suspect

From page A1

the owner," Morales said in an interview.

Because of the holidays, the hearing would be scheduled for early next month.

Morales refused to comment on reports that most of the cars seized in Makati came from Cebu, saying that smuggling in Cebu "is a thing of the past."

Some do not share this view.

Jose Manuel Cuenco, Cada president, wondered about the presence of luxury vehicles in the city since these were not available in any car dealers' showrooms.

"It's quite sad that Cebu is known to be the venue for smuggling. There are luxury cars in Manila that came from Cebu," he said.

Cuenco recalled that, before, the cars smuggled into Cebu came from Japan and Korea, but more European cars were now coming in.

Subic show

In August, 18 luxury cars were destroyed in the Subic Bay Freeport in a nationally televised event to show the Arroyo administration was determined to eliminate rampant smuggling in the area.

Officials at that time said more smuggled cars would be destroyed, but the August show was never repeated.

Philippine-based auto makers, notably Ford and Toyota, have raised alarm at the blatant smuggling of cars, saying this was killing the local automotive industry, forcing the closure of shops catering to its needs, and resulting in worker layoffs.

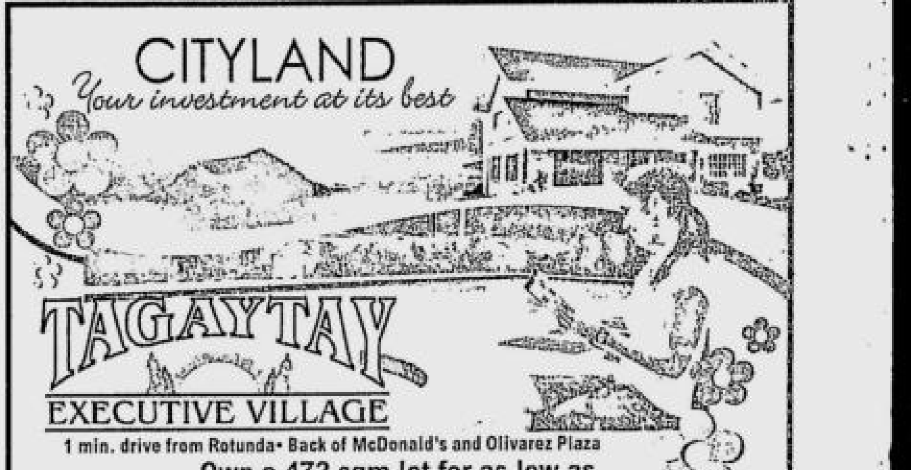
National Bureau of Investigation Deputy Director Edmund Arugay said owners of the 81 vehicles seized would be required to submit official receipts of purchase, certificates of registration, proof of ownership and tax payments.

"An owner has already called me saying that he would submit the proper documents to us, but we would still scrutinize his claims," said Arugay, who is PASG chief for operations.

He said some documents, particularly the certificates of payment, approved by the Land Transportation Office could have been faked.

"Out of the 84 vehicles at the shop, 81 were initially found to be lacking the necessary documents proving that they had been imported legally," said Undersecretary Antonio Villar Jr.

At least one Lamborghini, one Ferrari, 21 BMWs, 16 Mercedes Benzes, 11 Porsche sports cars, four Jaguars and three Volvos were among those subject to verification, Villar said. *With a report from Margaux C. Ortiz in Manila*



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Pangasinan natives meet in cyberspace

From page A1

(www.pangasinan.org) has allowed them to connect and interact with their loved ones, find long lost friends, and organize help for the poor in their hometowns.

Thanks to Fernando Mariñas, a San Diego-based network system administrator of a US government agency, who created the website six years ago. Mariñas is from Tayug town in Pangasinan.

"This site is dedicated to the people of Pangasinan and those who trace their roots, or who have studied, worked, lived in there or just simply love the place," said the website's home page.

To date, Pangasinan Online is the most visited Pangasinan website in the World Wide Web. Its hit counter has registered more than 3.3 million visitors.

"Many more are going through the backdoor, meaning they create a shortcut going straight to their hometowns or school pages, by-passing the site's counter," Mariñas said.

According to Alexa (www.alexa.com), a website that provides Web traffic information, Pangasinan Online visitors far exceeded those that visited the Pangasinan provincial government website (www.pangasinan.gov.ph), which was launched in 1997.

Bridging the distance

Mariñas said he started the website in 1999 as Tayug.com "with the sole purpose of bridging the distance" that separated his town mates around the world.

Inspired by the growing Internet technology in 2001, Mariñas said he created Pangasinan Online that included all towns of the province. He adopted a simple, easy-to-navigate Web design.

"We don't have flying, roaring or disappearing images ... but if you are looking for your friends, relatives, former classmates or just simply want to view some photos of your town, you are on the right place," he said in the home page.

The site features school pages, personal pages, news and links, message boards for each town, a discussion corner, a reunion page, and even a poetry page.

First-time visitors will be tempted to open their hometown's page and browse its message board to look for familiar names. Or they could go to the personal pages where weddings, parties and other activities are posted.

But more than a venue for socialization, Pangasinan Online has also been successful in sending help to the poor back home. "It united our town mates in helping our *kabaleyan* (province mates)," Mariñas said.

Backpack project

The most popular of Pangasinan Online's projects is the "Backpack," which has benefited more than 15,000 grade school pupils in various villages in the province's 44 towns and four cities.

The project, which began in 2003, was meant to help poor parents buy basic necessities that their children needed in school.

"They can hardly afford to buy pencil, pad paper, crayons and other school supplies ... many children use plastic bags or bags made from used flour sack to carry their books and stuff," Mariñas said.

"We can help by sharing a little percentage of our blessings to these children."

But more than the backpacks, Pangasinan Online rallied the natives to help build classrooms, libraries and health facilities in the depressed communities.

A fully equipped learning center has been built in Barangay Labuan in San Quintin town, an alumni building at the Luna Colleges in Tayug, and computer and science laboratories in other schools.

Other projects include repairs of parish halls, a lying-in clinic, and livelihood projects.

Happy endings

Looking back, Mariñas said he was touched every time he remembered "happy endings" that his website had made possible.

For instance, he said, two surfers met and ended up getting married.

"One [woman] even wrote she found her former boyfriend in high school. Now, they are seeing each other and soon they will be married. Many such stories in our message boards," he said.

A US Air Force family, who used to be stationed in the former Clark Air Base in Pampanga, was looking for a former maid they loved so much.

"They found her through this website; they ended up having a reunion in Pangasinan," Mariñas said.

According to Alexa, most of the surfers came from the Philippines (37.5 percent), United States (26.9 percent), Qatar (26 percent), United Kingdom (8 percent), Australia (1.9 percent), Canada (one percent) and France (one percent).

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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

TRUCKING SERVICES FOR NFA REGION VIII

The NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY, through its Corporate Budget for 2008 intends to apply the sum of FIFTEEN MILLION NINE HUNDRED TWELVE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED THIRTY PESOS (P15,912,930.00) being the Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) to payments under the contract of Trucking Services for NFA Region VIII for the year 2008. Bids received in excess of the ABC shall be automatically rejected at Bid opening.

The NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY now invites Bids from eligible Bidders for 2008 Trucking Services of NFA Region VIII.

LOT NO.	PROVINCE	SOURCE OF STOCKS	DESTINATION	DIK	Estimated Volume of 50 KG	RATE PER BAG	R TOTAL BUDGET COST (Php)	Min. No. of Trucks Required
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			Alangalang Whse	28.0	350,000	6.94	2,429,000.00	
			Maasin	185.5	1,000	36.28	35,280.00	
			Guiuan	149.0	1,000	29.19	28,190.00	
		Alangalang Whse	Naval, Biliran	97.0	2,000	23.07	46,140.00	
			Borongan	210.9	1,000	38.21	38,210.00	
		Ormoc Port	Ormoc Whse	1.2	100,000	4.80	480,000.00	
			TOTAL		605,000		3,858,820.00	
2	S LEYTE	Maasin Port	Maasin Whse	2.5	105,000	4.80	504,000.00	6
		Maasin Whse	Baybay Whse	78.5	1,000	18.67	18,670.00	
			St Bernard	120.5	4,000	23.61	94,440.00	
		Baybay Port	Baybay Whse	2.0	80,000	4.80	384,000.00	
			TOTAL		190,000		1,001,110.00	
3	BILIRAN	Naval Port	Naval Whse	2.0	130,000	4.80	624,000.00	6
4	W SAMAR	Catbalogan Port	Catbalogan Whse	1.0	300,000	4.80	1,440,000.00	6
		Catbalogan GID	Calbayog whse	69.0	2,000	16.41	32,820.00	
			Oras, E Samar	121.0	80,000	23.70	1,896,000.00	
		Calbayog Port	Calbayog Whse	1.0	170,000	4.80	816,000.00	
			TOTAL		552,000		4,184,820.00	
5	N SAMAR	San Jose Port	Bobon Whse	7.5	140,000	4.92	688,800.00	8
			Rawis Whse	63.0	150,000	14.98	2,247,000.00	
			Catubig Whse	84.0	60,000	19.98	1,198,800.00	
			Victoria Whse	36.0	30,000	8.68	260,400.00	
			TOTAL		380,000		4,395,000.00	
6	E SAMAR	Borongan Port	Borongan Whse	7.0	180,000	4.92	885,600.00	6
		Borongan Whse	Oras Whse	76.9	2,000	18.29	36,580.00	
		Guiuan Port	Guiuan Whse	1.5	100,000	4.80	480,000.00	
			Borongan Whse	114.1	20,000	22.35	447,000.00	
			TOTAL		302,000		1,849,180.00	
			GRAND TOTAL		2,159,000		15,912,930.00	

The bidders may bid for as many lots as he is interested.

Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding using non-discretionary pass/fail criteria as specified in the Implementing Rules and Regulations Part A (IRR-A) of Republic Act 9184 (R.A. 9184), otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act".

Interested Bidders may obtain further information from the NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY (telephone number: (053)323-4240 fax number: (053)323-8601) and inspect the Bidding Documents at NFA, Pawing Palo, Leyte starting *December 26, 2007 to January 4, 2008 from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.* A complete set of Bidding Documents may be purchased by interested Bidders upon payment of a non-refundable fee which are as follows:

Lot 1 (N. Leyte)	—	4,500.00	Lot 4 (W. Samar)	—	4,500.00
Lot 2 (S. Leyte)	—	2,000.00	Lot 5 (N. Samar)	—	5,000.00
Lot 3 (Biliran)	—	2,000.00	Lot 6 (E. Samar)	—	2,000.00

The **NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY** will hold a Pre-Bid Conference open to all interested parties on *January 11, 2008 @ 09:00 AM* at NFA Auditorium Lobby Pawing Palo, Leyte.

Bids & eligibility requirements must be delivered during the bid opening on *January 23, 2008 @ 09:00 AM at NFA Auditorium Lobby Pawing Palo, Leyte.* All bids must be accompanied by a Bid security in an amount at least equal to, and not lower than a percentage of the Approved Budget for the Contract to be bid, in the following schedule and form or any combination thereof: Cash or Cashier's Check or Manager's Check (Cashier's or Manager's Check payable to NFA issued by a reputable commercial bank issued in Tacloban City) – one percent (1%); or Surety Bond issued by GSIS marked "Callable on Demand" - two & half percent (2.5%). Late Bids shall not be accepted.

The **NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY** reserves the right to accept or reject any Bid, to annul the bidding process, and to reject all Bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected Bidder or Bidders.

(Sgd.) ANTONIO J. ADORABLE
RBAC Chairman/ARD

(PDI – December 22, 2007)

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2007

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OPINION

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Pathetic finish

EDITORIAL

ORGANIZERS OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES have achieved what no other sports organization has done: turning national teams from also-rans into instant champions. If the Association of Southeast Asian Nations mandates a rotating chairmanship, the SEA Games now appears to have institutionalized a rotating championship. Thus, when Thailand hosted this year's Games in Nakhon Ratchasima, it captured the championship. Two years ago, it was the Philippines' turn to host the Games—and claim the overall championship. Vietnam accomplished the same thing in 2003, Malaysia in 2001 and so on, down the the line, almost from the Games' inception in 1977, with very few exceptions.

The secret behind this wondrous transformation of mediocre national teams into regional powerhouses is probably one of the most widely known in the SEA Games. One reason is that the host country gets to pick a handful of sports for inclusion and, of course, it selects those where it is assured of gold medals. Thailand, for instance, picked futsal and netball for this year's Games. When the Philippines was host two years ago, it insisted on including *arnis*. In 2003, Vietnam introduced the largely unheard of sports of fin swimming and shuttlecock. This advantage may not influence the overall medal standings when a team is as dominant as Thailand was in the recently concluded Games, but it can tip the scale when the results are close. If this practice looks like loading the dice or stacking the cards, it is. And the wonder is that the SEA Games Federation, the policymaking body of the biennial competitions, continues to wink at it.

Even more critical—and dubious—is the new practice of letting the host country pick the referees and judges for the various sports. There would be no problem if all the events in the competition are decided by scores that can be readily counted or measured, like track and field, swimming or golf. But in sports that put the scoring in the hands of the judges, such as gymnastics, boxing, diving or wushu, a little pampering or pressure from the host country can go a long way in determining the results.

Which was what happened in the boxing competitions, if Filipino boxing officials are to be believed. They claimed that one or two Filipina boxers were cheated in the scoring and therefore of victory, and to protest the biased scoring, at least two Filipino boxers surrendered without throwing a punch, giving Thailand 16 of the 17 golds at stake. The other view, of course, is that our boxers were beaten fair and square (after sending an inferior and ill-prepared "B" team); or if indeed they were cheated, that was only sweet revenge for Thailand whose world-class boxers had allegedly been cheated in the Manila Games.

The irony is that Thailand didn't need any help to stamp its class in regional sports this time. Its dominance cannot be disputed. By the time the games ended, Thai athletes had won a total of 183 gold medals, almost thrice the number of championships won by second-place Malaysia, which had 67. Counting all the medals awarded, Thailand was way ahead of the pack, with 183 golds, 123 silvers and 102 bronzes for a total of 408, almost twice the number won by Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia.

And the Philippines? Well, it was right in the middle of the pack at No. 6 with a pathetic 41 golds, edged out of fifth place by tiny Singapore. That was a steep descent from the 2005 Games, when Filipino athletes ruled 113 events and ended up overall champion, the country's worst placing in four decades and a pathetic finish that cannot be explained by griping, "We wuz robbed."

This year's harvest would have been even leaner, except for the participation of Filipino-Americans, particularly Miguel Molina who won three individual golds and a fourth one in the relay to end up as the Most Valuable Athlete of the Games. Fil-Ams, in fact, won eight golds, no thanks to the various sports organizations that are supposed to handle the recruitment and training of Filipino athletes. What this underscores is the increasing reliance of some of our sports organizations to just piggy-back on the sports programs of foreign schools.

This is a shameful way to do it, but that seems to be the best thing some of our so-called sports leaders can think of. In sports as well as in many aspects of national life, it seems that we have become a country without leadership, without vision, without pride.

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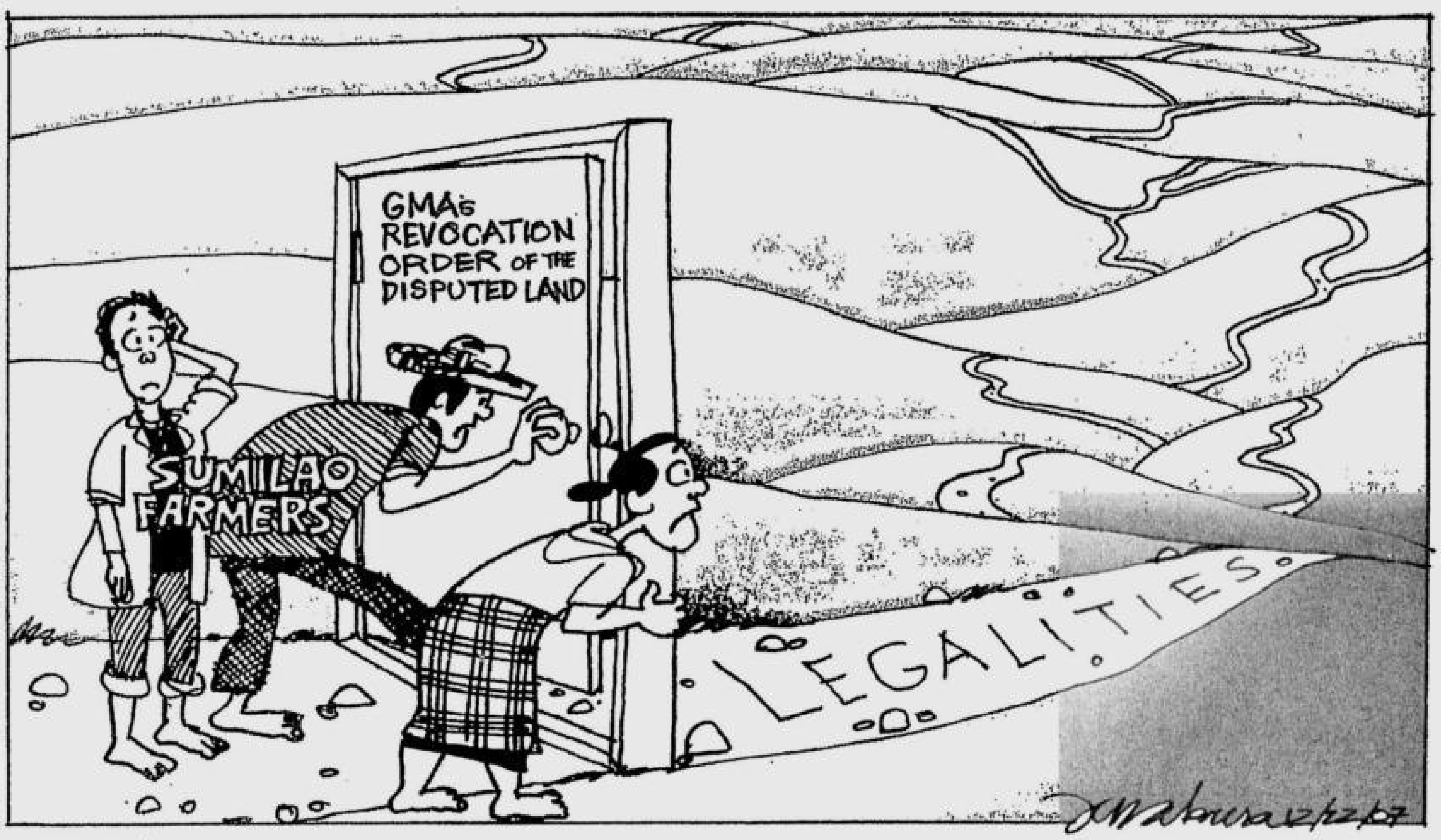

Pinoy happiness

PUBLIC LIVES

Randy David

THE OTHER NIGHT, WHILE WALKING around the acacia-lined oval of the University of the Philippines Diliman campus, I found myself trailing behind a group of young people lost in cheerful conversation. They moved unhurriedly and seemed completely oblivious of everything around them. Every stride they made was marked by laughter. I had seen this before in many places abroad where overseas Filipino workers congregate on their free days. It became clear to me suddenly what happiness means in our culture. Our happiness springs from good conversation, story-telling, and joking with relatives and friends.

Happiness, says the Greek philosopher Aristotle, occurs when our human capacities function well. For him, the most distinctive of these capacities is reason, and so happiness must be the contemplation of the results of reason. But he wavered between equating happiness with contemplation and seeing it as the outcome of other human functions. Had he been a Filipino, Aristotle would have concluded that the good life is one lived in conversation.

The eminent American guru of Positive Psychology, Dr. Martin E. Seligman, was the guest of Stephen Sackur on BBC's "Hardtalk" this week. He talked of three forms of happiness: Positive Emotions, Total Engagement, and Meaning and Purpose. They are interrelated, he says, and indeed he talks of them as if they were stages. Of these, the easiest to achieve is the first—cheerfulness and laughter. The most difficult is anchoring life's meaning to a purpose that you believe to be larger than you. This concept of happiness is fascinating, but I think it is culture-bound. It is still resonant of the Western accent on the primacy of reason and the intellect.

Survey after survey has shown that Filipinos rank very high in the happiness index. But we are not really sure what happiness consists of for the average Pinoy. The most recent Social Weather Stations survey reports that 64 percent or more than two out of three Filipinos expect Christmas to be happy this year. This is, says SWS, comparable to the 62 percent of the previous two years, but much lower than the recorded 82 percent in 1982. I am certain that the Pinoy's capacity for happiness even in the most adverse circumstances would still be significantly higher than the scores for the bastions of Aristotelian contemplation, like Britain, France, or Germany.

What might this suggest about the Pinoy's notion of the good life? To me, it indicates a preference for sheer sociability—being with others for its own sake—over any form of intellectual or cognitive achievement. We often say that our notion of happiness is shallow (*mababaw ang ating kaligayahan*). So be it. I think theorists like Seligman or self-help gurus like Rick Warren will have to show how having a "higher" purpose in life deepens one's happiness, or why this should be the norm for everyone.

When the Pinoy says he feels happiest when he is at home with family and friends, I think he is expressing a wisdom our ancestors have always known. We are indeed a culture of conviviality. All our basic values confirm this: *pakikisama, hiya, utang na loob*, etc. They all refer to standards prescribing smooth relations with others. They stand in contrast to Western values like virtue, wisdom, personal authenticity, freedom, etc.

Sociologists might explain this difference as an aspect of the contrast between pre-modernity and modernity. They would suggest that the direction of all societal evolution is toward the emergence of the individual from the control of his family, clan, community or nation. To a certain extent this is probably true. But how do we explain the fact that many overseas Filipino workers and immigrants who have managed to wrench themselves away from the womb of their society nevertheless continue to be emotionally engaged in the affairs of their primordial communities. Like turtles, they seem to have brought their homes on their backs.

The answer, perhaps, lies in the courage, faith, assurance and, yes, cheerfulness, that we Filipinos effortlessly draw from being in the company of other people we know. I am sure we will find this as well in other cultures in varying degrees, but not in the exceptional way in which Filipinos seek out each other's company.

In the 1960s, motivational psychologists like David McClelland were preaching the gospel of the N-Ach (need for achievement). They measured cultures like ours and pronounced them short in N-Ach. Today, mercifully, they have focused their attention on the economically-advanced societies, measuring them on the happiness index, and pronouncing them severely lacking in happiness.

The modern preoccupation with happiness is amazing. It has spawned a whole industry in those countries that have solved the basic problems of mass poverty but now must contend with what Seligman calls the "epidemic of depression." Clearly, there is no direct relationship between wealth and happiness. Beyond a certain level of wealth, Seligman says, more money buys less happiness. Happiness, just like economic growth, is a worthy goal of the state, Seligman declares. And many governments are listening.

We Pinoys are still a long way from vanquishing the scourge of mass poverty. But this seems a lot easier today than the conquest of misery itself. We may be a failure at governance for now, but it is a great gift that we know how to be happy. Happy Holidays!

* * *

Comments to public.lives@gmail.com

Double shame

GET REAL

Solita Collas-Monsod

ONE HAS TO WONDER WHAT HOLD SAN Miguel has on Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman. His cease-and-desist order of Dec. 12 regarding the Sumilao case (see last week's column) sounded more like an admonition to the farmers than to San Miguel Foods Inc. (SMFI). While he told the former to refrain from even entering, much less doing anything on, the controversial 144-hectare property, he actually told San Miguel that it could continue with its "presently ongoing activities" on the land—effectively giving the corporation carte blanche to do anything on it, making irrelevant his admonition to SMFI to "refrain from further undertaking development activities."

Pangandaman's "Recommendation" to President Macapagal-Arroyo, dated Dec. 18 (the day after the President met with the Sumilao farmers and the Catholic bishops, with Bukidnon Gov. Joe Zubiri and Pangandaman in attendance), which the Office of the President used as the basis for its order revoking or canceling the "Conversion Order" on the property, also has that "*bakla*" quality—no offense intended to the gay community. While Pangandaman did recommend the revocation of the conversion order on the ground that using the area for a piggery was a complete departure from the original conversion plan, he also said that the five-year period within which the conversion plan was to be fulfilled had not yet elapsed—in fact, SMFI has two more years, or until Oct. 26, 2009, to go.

In so stating, Pangandaman has provided SMFI with more ammunition, more leverage, to fight the Malacañang order, either administratively or in court, or in any possible extrajudicial settlement with the farmers. And, in his seeming anxiety to accommodate SMFI, he not only ignored previous DAR administrative orders, as he did in his Dec. 12 order, but he also contradicted his own previous official statements on the matter.

The ridiculousness of his stand that the conversion period does not end until 2009 is immediately apparent when we look at the following dates: The conversion was approved by the Office of the President in 1996, and affirmed with finality by the Supreme Court in Aug. 25 1999.

Counting five years from then, you get to Aug. 25, 2004 as the time limit for completing the conversion plan, barring requests for extension which should be made at least six months before the lapse of the five-year period.

This seems simple enough, and both the Department of Agrarian Reform officials and Pangandaman himself used the same calculations when the former said that as of June 20, 2005, there was no development in the property, and the latter himself said, in his order dated Oct. 27, 2006, that there was a failure to develop the property within the five-year maximum period:

"Records show that from the time that the said Order was affirmed by the Supreme Court on 25 August 1999 and up to the present, or for a period of more than five years, respondent NQSRMDC failed to completely develop the property within the five-year maximum period ..."

Obviously, something happened between October 2006 and late 2007 that made Pangandaman do a volte-face on the calculation of the expiration period. (Could it be the May 2007 elections and the fund-raising activities that Pangandaman reportedly indulged in?) So that, now he starts counting the five-year period from October 2004—when SMFI (not Quisumbing, mind you—as he had already sold the property to SMFI in 2002) got some kind of zoning compliance certificate—which Pangandaman translates into a development permit.

What say the reader?

If this kind of logic is acceptable, the conclusion must follow that the rules on conversion, particularly the maximum five-year limit, are inutile in preventing circumventions in CARP coverage. All the landowner has to do is apply for conversion with a beautiful conversion plan, then delay getting his permits for as long as he likes, because the five-year clock will start ticking only when the last permit comes in.

Did I say shame on Pangandaman last week? I say double shame on him this time. It gives one comfort that his appointment was again not confirmed by the Commission on Appointments (an unconfirmed rumor is that members of Cojuangco's party were pushing heavily for his confirmation). Maybe the President will get the message and let him go.

Now for the letter of Governor Zubiri (INQUIRER, 12/20/07), where he takes exception to my statement about him in my column two weeks ago (referring to the sale of the controversial land by Quisumbing), specifically the part which stated: "What he [Quisumbing] does is sell the land to SMFI in 2002 (within the 5-year period) allegedly for a very pretty penny, the transaction allegedly facilitated by Bukidnon Gov. Jose Zubiri (this is the grave-robbing analogy)."

The funny part is that Zubiri himself says in his letter—though he disclaims any acquaintance with Quisumbing—that having been told by Sumilao Mayor Mary Ann Baula that the Quisumbing land was for sale, it was he who "immediately relayed the information to SMFI" whose officials were looking for land.

Does that fall under the word "facilitate," or not? Actually, the report I received was that he brokered it, but I wasn't about to use the term.

At any rate, I understand that in the Malacañang meeting of the farmers with the President last Dec. 17, Zubiri pledged his unconditional support to the Sumilao farmers. For which I take off my hat to him. The farmers need the help of "big guns" in battling giant San Miguel. And they need Zubiri to help even out the odds.

If only he does not change his mind.

Happy or sad at Christmas?

SOCIAL CLIMATE

Mahar Mangahas

EVERY FOURTH QUARTER, SINCE 2002, THE Social Weather Survey asks respondents if they think the coming Christmas will be happy (*masaya*) or sad (*malungkot*). The 2007 round, done last Nov. 30 to Dec. 3, finds that 64 percent of the respondents expect this year's Christmas to be happy, 27 percent say it will be neither happy nor sad, and 8 percent think it will be sad.

(Taking only Christians, who were 95 percent of the sample, the happy percentage becomes 66 and the sad percentage is still 8. I will disregard this refinement in what follows.)

Recipients of the SWS Christmas card, which has a bar chart of the data for 2002-06, can now fill out the space for 2007 with the new numbers, and see flat conditions since 2004, with happy expectations ranging from 62 to 64 percent and sad ones ranging from 7 to 10 percent.

But 2002 and 2003 were much better. Thus, for four years running, nearly two out of three adult Filipinos have looked forward to happy holidays. This happens to be a comedown from the previous two years. The happy ones were 82 percent in 2002 and 77 percent in 2003, and the sad ones were only 3 percent in both of those years.

Politics? We can dispose immediately of the suspicion that the difference between 2002-03 and 2004-07 could be due to political factors. SWS tabulations show that the 2007 Christmas optimism is practically the same for pros and antis regarding Erap's pardon. Such optimism is not so clearly related to satisfaction with GMA as to surely stand up if tested against other factors. In any case, a secular government does not really have any specific mandate to raise happiness, or to reduce sadness, at Christmastime.

Less optimistic in NCR. Incidentally, Metro Manila is much less optimistic about the coming holidays, with only 55 percent expecting to be happy, and a large 12 percent thinking it will be sad.

Elsewhere, in the rest of Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao, the optimistic percentages are 65, 68 and 66, while the pessimistic percentages are 9, 5 and 6 respectively.

A college degree helps. On the other hand, college graduates stand out as the most optimistic about the coming Christmas, with 71 percent expecting it to be happy, and merely 3 percent thinking it will be sad.

Optimism is 64 percent among high-school graduates who have not gone on to finish college, 63 percent among elementary graduates who have not finished high school, and only 60 percent among those who did not finish their elementary. Pessimism is a steady 8-9 percent in all three lower levels of schooling.

Social class. Christmas optimism is the same, at 64 percent, for the very poor Es, the *masa* Ds, and the middle-to-upper class ABCs.

But social class still matters, because Christmas pessimism is 9 percent among the Es, compared to 8 percent among the Ds, and only 5 percent among the ABCs.

Age. Among the youngest adults, those aged 18-24, Christmas optimism is 64 percent. It peaks at 69 percent among those aged 25-34, and then slips to 64 percent among those at 35-44, and 62 percent among those aged 45 years and above.

Gender and marriage. Women are a bit more optimistic than men. The happy-versus-sad percentage score for women is 66-6; for men, it is 62-9.

An interesting fact is that the gender-connection only shows up among those married. Sixty-nine percent of wives, compared to only 62 percent of husbands, expect a happy Christmas. Nine percent of husbands, compared to only 5 percent of wives, expect a sad one.

On the other hand, among those single/never married and among those widowed/separated, whether women or men, optimism about Christmas is almost the same (59-61 percent). Pessimism about Christmas is higher among those single/never married (10-11 percent), than among the widowed, etc. (6-8 percent).

Focus on the sad. Christmas is a happy season, and yet it is truly Christian to emphasize those who are sad at this time. It is meritorious to give to those who cannot give in return, and to lend to those who cannot repay. The use of happiness surveys to learn more about sadness, rather than happiness, is in fact the consciously Christian thing to do.

* * *

The Sumilao saga. Despite being granted an audience with President Macapagal-Arroyo in Malacañang, the Sumilao farmers who marched from Bukidnon to Manila are still far away from actually acquiring the Quisumbing estate.

What the President did was only to revoke the conversion of the land for non-agricultural use, which was the means used by Quisumbing to evade coverage from the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). She did not specifically order the Department of Agrarian Reform to implement CARP on the estate, nor did she order DAR to require estate-buyer San Miguel Farms to cease and desist from developing the land for its own purposes.

The call by some elements of big business for the "rule of law, not emotion" is hypocritical because it was Quisumbing and San Miguel Foods Inc. that had thwarted the application of the CARP Law in the first place, by securing approval for the conversion of the agricultural land to non-agricultural, and then failing to fulfill the conditions of the conversion.

The Sumilao farmers have some reason to feel happier about Christmas this year. I pray they will be truly happy about Christmas in 2008.

* * *

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Asian literacy as a global concern

COMMENTARY

Neni Sta. Romana Cruz

IT MUST BE THIS "GENTLE MADNESS" THAT A passion for books inflicts: While most of the city folks were caught in the usual holiday frenzy, I was blissfully serving self-dictated duty days at the National Library.

It was not research that brought me there this time but the pleasant though dusty task of opening 20-plus boxes of book donations from the high school students of United World College of Southeast Asia in Singapore (UWC). This bounty is part of its "Promoting Asian Literacy Global Concern" program coordinated by faculty advisers Anu Rudhil and Althea Besa Luz, a colleague from International School Manila.

The students had solicited free freight service to Manila from a forwarding company. With the special assistance of National Library director Prudenciana "Nanie" Cruz, the Philippine addressee did not have to pay for any handling expense.

It is never difficult to find beneficiaries for such donations, especially when the materials are in excellent condition. But the days of donations as simple turnovers are long gone.

Though the books and magazines for children and adults are not my personal donations, it was not easy parting with them without some assurance that the recipients had existing libraries and reading programs to maximize their use. Also, institutions outside Metro Manila were preferred beneficiaries, as the National Capital Region is a frequent recipient.

One beneficiary was the De La Salle "Learn to Read, Read to Learn" "BookMobile & Reading Program." A brainchild of La Salle Lipa president Bro. Mawel Pajarillo, FSC, it was launched several months ago initially for the Rafael Lojo Memorial Elementary School and the Brion Silva Memorial Elementary School, both in Lipa City. The books from UWC will boost their starter collection of about 1,000 storybooks. The UWC students will be pleased to know that their books will also go to less privileged La Salle schools like in Ozamiz that Bro. Benildo Feliciano, FSC assists, and to children under the care of Bantay Bata (BB) Foundation in Bulacan, as requested by BB foundation official Elvira L. Yulo.

Public schools always need reading materials but National Library director Nanie Cruz will oversee that distribution. My recent experience in the neighborhood public school my family has "adopted" over the past years has taught me painful lessons. Losing library space to a classroom is not as disappointing as the mystifying loss of the entire collection of about 600 new books. We continue to nurture the hope that children are enjoying them in the privacy of their homes.

Meanwhile, a new collection is being built in a carry-on luggage that has now become the portable library on wheels for the children.

Do such efforts really make a difference in the context of an ailing educational system and the total number of public schools needing books?

In this season of hope and new beginnings, staggering statistics cannot discourage. What seem like puny steps gain new significance when one reads accounts of elementary public school teachers enthused about their recent success stories, "highs" they cannot forget—an assignment that Sa Aklat Sisikat trainor Pat Jardiniano encouraged them to write at a JobAlike session at the October Programang Kaakbay conference.

Girlie E. Catanus of Commonwealth Elementary School talked of her frustration with the total lack of response as she taught in front of the class for an entire hour. She has long abandoned that method after discovering how planning for student group work with specific tasks and expectations for every group has proven more effective.

Editha M. Lontoc of Kalawaan Elementary School in Pasig wondered how to teach basic sight words to four nonreaders in class. She thought of making them create their own flashcards by asking them to cut out all the words they did not recognize in old magazines and newspapers.

Instead of simply dismissing her class bully as a perennial problem, Mary Jean E. Devilleres of Pinaglabanan Elementary School decided to go beyond his behavior and understood him better. It was her treat of Chicken Joy, something he had never tasted, that forged their friendship.

An unsigned account talks of her sacrificing her Saturdays, what she calls her "Washington Day" (laundry days) to be able to coach student contestants. Her efforts have paid off in their victories. She is convinced that "To aim for excellence, put in your best."

Easily the most heartwarming of all stories is that of Marilou Dimanarig of Payatas A Elementary School who chose to go against the current. She was a relatively well-paid OFW in Hong Kong when she decided to heed the late Education Secretary Raul Roco's invitation: that if they would return home to teach—the job they were trained for—there would be teaching positions awaiting them. That was exactly what Marilou did—and she has never looked back.

One does not always see the teachers in this light.

Neni Sta. Romana Cruz is a member of the Philippine Board on Books for Young People and a trustee of the Sa Aklat Sisikat Foundation. Email comments to nenisrc@gmail.com

Erap's complaint; Christmas in the Senate

BETWEEN DEADLINES

LAST FULL SHOW. IT WAS THE MOVIES THAT helped keep convicted rapist Romeo Jalosjos still locked in jail. To make sure that his instructions to stop Jalosjos' supposed Dec. 16 release were followed, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez stayed up all night. How did he do it? He watched movies on DVD.

Gonzalez recalled that on the night of Dec. 15, President Macapagal-Arroyo was calling him up almost every hour. He said the President was upset about the supposed release because she wanted her policy of releasing inmates who are already 70 years old to prevail. (Jalosjos is 67.)

To keep himself awake to monitor developments at the Bureau of Corrections and to take the President's calls, the 77-year-old justice secretary and recent kidney donee turned to the movies.

"If she was not that upset, she would not be calling me every hour," he said in an interview with reporters earlier this week. "*Buti* I survived watching DVD, *hindi ako natulog* [It's a good thing I survived watching DVD, I did not fall asleep]," he said.

Jalosjos was not released on the 16th, with Gonzalez saying the computation of his commuted sentence and time credits was under review. He added that the DOJ's computation puts his earliest possible release date at April 2009, while Jalosjos would turn 70 in 2010.

Jalosjos has been insisting, however, that he is already a free man. *L. Salaverria*

* * *

TELL ME WHO YOUR FRIENDS ARE. The Christmas parties senators threw for the Senate media revealed the current alignment of forces in the upper chamber.

Minority Leader Nene Pimentel Jr. joined forces with minority bloc members Ping Lacson, Jamby Madrigal and Loren Legarda in hosting a party.

As if to emphasize their solidness, the rest of the minority bloc—Mar Roxas, Noynoy Aquino and Pong Biazon and, yes, even Majority Leader Kiko Pangilinan—threw their own party on behalf of the Liberal Party.

Pangilinan's original "barkada," the "Wednesday Group" with Nacionalista president Manny Villar, Joker Arroyo, Vice President Noli De Castro and ex-senator Ralph Recto, also hosted their own. As some sort of compromise, Pangilinan stayed away from the Group's party but contributed prizes for the raffle.

In the majority bloc, siblings Pia and Alan Cayetano teamed up for a sports fest-cum-Christmas party.

Ed Angara, as usual, hosted his own party, while Miriam Defensor-Santiago chose not to host a party.

Dick Gordon, meanwhile, teamed up with fellow administration senators Migz Zubiri, Bong Revilla and Lito Lapid, who could not possibly attend his own party. He is in the United States.

Jinggoy Estrada joined up with Johnny Enrile, who brought his former aide-de-camp Greg Honasan. Before the party, word spread that former President Joseph Estrada would make an appearance. Honasan, a former Estrada ally who has switched to the administration side, made his exit before the former president showed up.

Newbie Chiz Escudero proved to be the season's surprise, preferring to sponsor a party all on his own. Reporters do not recall a single time he threw a Christmas party for the media during his nine-year stint as a congressman, not even when he was already the House minority leader. *D. Pazzibugan*

* * *

EXCUSE ME, I WAS INVITED! Let the man hounded by the controversy of the century put things in perspective. An irked Joseph Estrada, pardoned plunderer and deposed President, has repeatedly complained to the INQUIRER for always appending labels like "pardoned plunderer" or "deposed President" to his name. Suffering six years in detention is more than enough, he insisted. The most recent example? A front-page photo of him dancing with gusto at a Senate Christmas party. The caption described him as the "ex-Senator, ousted-convicted-pardoned ex-President" who was a "much welcomed gatecrasher" at the party.

"*Pambihira naman* [Unbelievable]. Ousted and convicted president *na nga*, gatecrasher *pa*," he told the INQUIRER over the phone. "I did not gatecrash. I was invited by my son, Senator Jinggoy, and Senator Enrile," he said. The annoyed Estrada added that he had other commitments that night but decided to drop by precisely because of the invitation. He ended with a suggestion, "Instead of convicted plunderer and deposed president, why not say illegally ousted president?" *J. Uy*

* * *

TRANSPARENCY. WANNA BET? The Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp., particularly its president Jose Ibazeta, has drawn flak the last several weeks for alleged conflict of interest in the bidding of the government's power assets.

Ibazeta has links to businessman Enrique Razon Jr., a known Palace friend, and one of those said to be involved with the consortium of Monte Oro Grid Resources Corp. and State Grid Corp. of China, the winning bidder for the 25-year National Transmission Corp. concession.

Although not denying his links to Razon, Ibazeta has repeatedly defended the integrity of the bidding process, saying nobody—not even him—can influence it. As if to prove a point, PSALM softened its original stance and invited the media to witness the Transco auction.

Members of the media, however, were restricted to a room one floor below the bidding area—watching the proceedings via a TV monitor, sans the audio feed most of the time. Still, better than nothing. While waiting for the conclusion of the almost three-hour-long evaluation process, the resourceful beat reporters started a bet on who would win the Transco concession. About half of those in the room ended up P100 richer by 4 p.m. *A. Ho*

A quality Christmas

YOUNG BLOOD

Mylene Flores

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

WHEN OUR QUALITY CONTROL PROFESSOR ASKED WHAT quality Christmas meant for us, it made me think. What is a "quality Christmas" to me anyway? I gave her my homework. But when I read it again today, I didn't think I was thinking "out of the box." I felt so uptight with my resolutions. Yes, I followed her 500-word requirement (adding 70 more words to it later) and submitted just in time. But reading it sounded so practical, stiff and boring. I wanted to give it one more try and make it a little more personal this time, something that is interestingly readable now.

We were given three definitions of quality from three different quality experts. We were expected to choose only one guru and I chose W. Edward Deming for this definition, "Quality is the predictable degree of uniformity and dependability, at low costs and suitable to the market."

I started to think about his meaning of quality and how I would associate my thoughts of a quality Christmas to it.

Counting from now, Christmas is about two months away. There are a lot of nice things out in the market especially that Christmas is coming a few days from now. You can't help but adore all the beautiful objects displayed on stores and racks. You see a lot of items that will make you remember a few people, and you would want to buy these things for them this Christmas. But it's not always that practical to buy what is there or what is readily available for the picking. Not everything you see in malls, small stores, or advertisements on television will always fit your budget. Saddening but that's the truth. Not everyone is privileged with so much money but the thought of having enough to survive will do.

They also say that Christmas is for kids; and as you grow up you lose the very excitement of celebrating it. You've probably outgrown the insecurities of not having something that your sibling received for Christmas before or something you've asked from your parents that they weren't able to get for you because they lacked the funding for it. You might probably hear a few people say "Geez, I might have to spend a few more pesos again now that Christmas is here once more!" Some people make Christmas sound like a burden and an obligation. Some people just forget what Christmas means nowadays for some of these reasons. Some people just forget how Christmas is supposed to be felt and celebrated.

Christmas isn't just about what kind of gift you bought or how much time you spent accounting for the long list of expenses you've made just to give presents for numerous nieces, nephews or godchildren. "Quality is the predictable degree of uniformity and dependability," which will make you think that Christmas is the gift of love that you can offer your family and friends. Christmas is an opportunity to be blessed, knowing that you have a family where you can be one and the same; a family you can always be with and depend to for all times. There's an absolute moment given to you, for you to grasp in your heart and soul all the days of your life. It is something extraordinary that never leaves your being.

"[A]t low costs and suitable to the market," I know that I didn't want to spend too much money on gifts because I needed to save and be more practical. Instead of losing the spirit of Christmas, I made several presents of my own. Most of my friends will be receiving personalized presents this Christmas, like accessories. You can always try making specially made gifts for family and friends. I think it will be more appreciated because it came straight from you. And if I were given a gift made by my siblings, a family member, or a friend, I'd be really touched to be given only one of its kind. And I say, through the celebration of Christ's birthday, the quality of a personalized gift from the people you love surpasses all requirements! And even if we're under an economic crisis, it's still heart-warming to see houses fully equipped with lights and lanterns, despite the possible high electricity bill to come, or when kids roam and sing you Christmas carols you used to sing when you were young.

If Christ wasn't born, we would still be wandering the ends of the world, continuously sinning. So, despite all the problems in the world, let's all remember that we'll always have a quality Christmas with us; a time where Christ, our savior celebrates his day of birth with all mankind; and where we're given the moment to share his special day with the people we love most. That's something worth cherishing.

Mylene Flores, 23, is a student at the University of the Philippines in Diliman.

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THEY SAID

Eternal truth

"Let all remember and let all be warned that the light of truth has never been extinguished, not by any man, not by any might; and that those who try to bury truth succeed only in digging their own graveyards, for truth is eternal—it cannot be extinguished; it is beyond murder."

—Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno, in a speech bewailing the killing of journalists and the slow resolution of the cases

Notorious

"If a foreign multilateral lending agency like the World Bank can take notice of these shady deals, the Arroyo administration must really be pushing the threshold of corrupt practices."

—Renato Reyes Jr., secretary general of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, after the World Bank suspended the release of a $232-million soft loan for Philippine road projects because of "collusion and excessive pricing"

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When does Christmas begin?

THE INQUIRER QUOTED FR. GENARO Diwa in a front-page story on Dec. 15: "We are the only country celebrating Christmas nine days earlier than the rest of the Universal Church." This is not so. The Philippines begins the celebration of Christmas, with the rest of the Church, on the night of Dec. 24. My source for this is the same Father Diwa, compiler of "Ordo 2008," the official liturgical guide of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' Episcopal Commission on Liturgy.

The "Ordo" states: "the Aguinaldo Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary" are "to be celebrated on the nine days before Christmas for the perseverance of the nation in faith." The texts for these Masses, as given in the CBCP-approved "Supplement to the Roman Sacramentary" are those of the Advent Masses for these days. The only difference, allowed by the indult from Rome, is that the "Gloria" is sung and the priest wears white vestments.

Here in Bacolod, Bishop Vicente M. Navarra has made it clear that only Masses celebrated early in the morning carry the privileges attached to the Misa de Gallo.

The Church's Christmas season ends in the Philippines, as everywhere else, with the Feast of the Lord's Baptism, usually the second Sunday of January.

—FR. SEÁN COYLE,
San Columbano,
PO Box 588, 6100 Bacolod City

After Ranario, GMA should make the same sacrifice for other OFWs

IT FELT GOOD TO HEAR THE NEWS THAT President Macapagal-Arroyo's appeal to Kuwaiti Emir Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah for the life of Filipino domestic helper Marilou Ranario has been granted. As a son of an overseas Filipino worker in Saudi Arabia, I was jubilated by this development which showed that our government truly cares for OFWs.

President Arroyo even flew to Kuwait to personally plead for the life of Ranario, a noble act and a "sacrifice" for a head of state. President Arroyo is well aware that OFWs help to keep our economy above water.

Filipinos, especially those whose loved ones are working abroad cannot afford to witness another OFW sent to the gallows just like what happened to Flor Contemplacion. Ranario is a triumph for the government.

May this government continue to defend the lives of OFWs, especially those who are in the same fix. This initiative of the President, which is similar to what she did with Angelo de la Cruz way back in 2004, deserves some commendation. Thank you, President Arroyo.

—ALPINE FRANCESCO,
f.alpine@yahoo.com

Nuns voice concern over ecological crisis

WE, DELEGATES TO THE ICM PHILIPPINE district assembly, a national gathering of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary held at De Meester Residence, D. Tuazon Avenue, Quezon City, issue this "Statement on the Ecological Crisis."

Our discernment led us to the realization that industrial and technological development aggression is behind climate change and global warming with their adverse effects on nature—land, forests, water, air, food sources and biodiversity—which further impact on human beings in the form of:

- Intensified poverty and powerlessness
- Landlessness and loss of ancestral domains, extinction of indigenous peoples, human rights violations and militarization
- Migration
- Increased social and health problems
- Proliferation of GMO/GEO (Genetically Modified Organisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms) products
- A consumerist lifestyle promoting greed, materialism and individualism

Scientific findings show the urgency of these crises and unless we address this now, we fear we will all perish.

We protest against agreements entered into by our government with investors that contribute to the escalation of this ecological crisis such as:

- Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement—with toxic wastes to be dumped in Philippine waters
- The proposed reopening of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant
- Foreign and local mining and logging companies which are destroying our natural resources
- Companies producing and promoting GMO/GEO products threatening all living species

We are convinced that God calls us today to protect, conserve and defend the integrity of Creation and take the side of the poor especially the indigenous peoples who are the direct victims of this crisis.

We call on all peoples to join us in the communal advocacy for the survival of Mother Earth and humanity, even as we support all groups already engaged in this.

—SR. ROSIE MENDOZA, ICM

'Sunny Christmas' dream

THIS IS IN REACTION TO THE ARTICLE "Christmas is where the heart is." (INQUIRER, 12/19/07)

That is so true. I miss the festive mood of Christmas in the Philippines. It's been four years since I came here to Toronto, and you bet I'd rather have a sunny Christmas with the whole country than a White Christmas. I miss the bonus (13th month pay) which is the shopping money, Christmas parties and, of course, the *noche buena* with the family.

I work in downtown Toronto and there's not much Christmas spirit in here. Now, I am dreaming not of a White Christmas but of a sunny Christmas in the Philippines.

—G. SOLANGON,
grace2solangon@yahoo.com

Pagasa explains 'changing' forecasts on Typhoon Mina

THIS IS IN REACTION TO THE NEWS ARTICLES on typhoon Mina. (INQUIRER, 11/25/07) After the typhoon spared most of the Bicol region, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) found itself under after-the-fact criticisms. However, we were heartened by the favorable commentaries from broadcast media and by the public's support for the continuing effort to upgrade the agency's facilities. Still, please allow us to explain the circumstances behind the forecasts and warnings regarding Mina.

In the early morning of Nov. 21, the typhoon entered the Philippine area of responsibility as a tropical storm. Pagasa issued an initial bulletin at 5 a.m. At 8 a.m., together with NDCC (National Disaster Coordinating Council) officials, it held a press conference and presented a "scenario," based on data and numerical (mathematical) model forecasts, which saw Mina moving toward the Bicol region. At 8 a.m. of Nov. 22, Mina intensified into a typhoon. A second press conference was called. This time, the forecast scenario presented other forecasting models showing that Mina could change direction and move toward the Aurora-Isabela area. At that point, the first forecast scenario was given higher weight. The first and second forecast scenarios were reflected in the two NDCC updates issued at 12 noon and 6 p.m. of Nov. 22 and sent to NDCC regional offices in Regions 5, 4A and 2.

Our decision in giving more weight to the first forecast scenario was based on the data we had. Our weather surveillance radars in Baler, Aurora and Virac, Catanduanes caught Mina in their observation range 11 p.m. of Nov. 22. Based on radar-monitoring, coupled with the use of numerical models, our forecasters were able to forecast Mina's continuing westward and southwestward movement in the morning of Nov. 23, prompting them to upgrade the signal in southern Bicol from No. 2 to No. 3. Then early in the morning of Nov. 24, the radars detected a shift in Mina's direction toward Aurora-Isabela (second scenario). In addition to the advisories on the first and second forecast scenarios, the governors of Isabela, Aurora, Cagayan and Quirino were told by the NDCC and Pagasa of this change in Mina's direction.

The forecast scenarios and updates on Mina were also presented by Pagasa during three NDCC meetings chaired by President Macapagal-Arroyo. More press conferences were held—two to three times daily at the NDCC from the time Signal No. 3 was raised, wherein Pagasa always mentioned the first and second forecast scenarios.

Clearly, Pagasa gave the threatened areas ample warnings and lead-time to prepare for the typhoon. Mina made landfall in the vicinity of Palanan, Isabela at 9 p.m. of Nov. 25, or about four days from the time we first issued our warning on the second scenario (in the second conference); and one day and 15 hours from the time we announced the change in Mina's direction (in the third conference).

—PRISCO D. NILO,
director, Philippine Atmospheric,
Geophysical and Astronomical Services
Administration (Pagasa)

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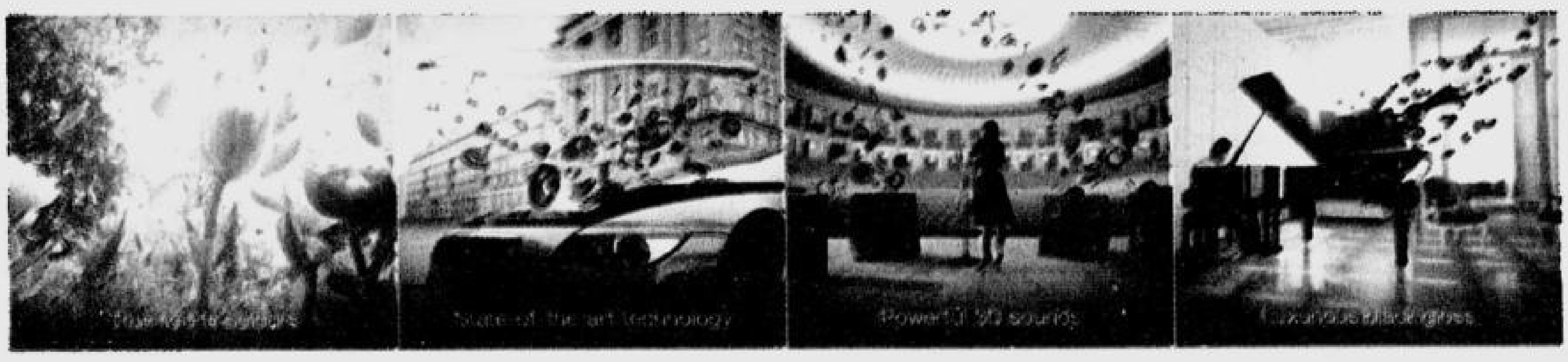

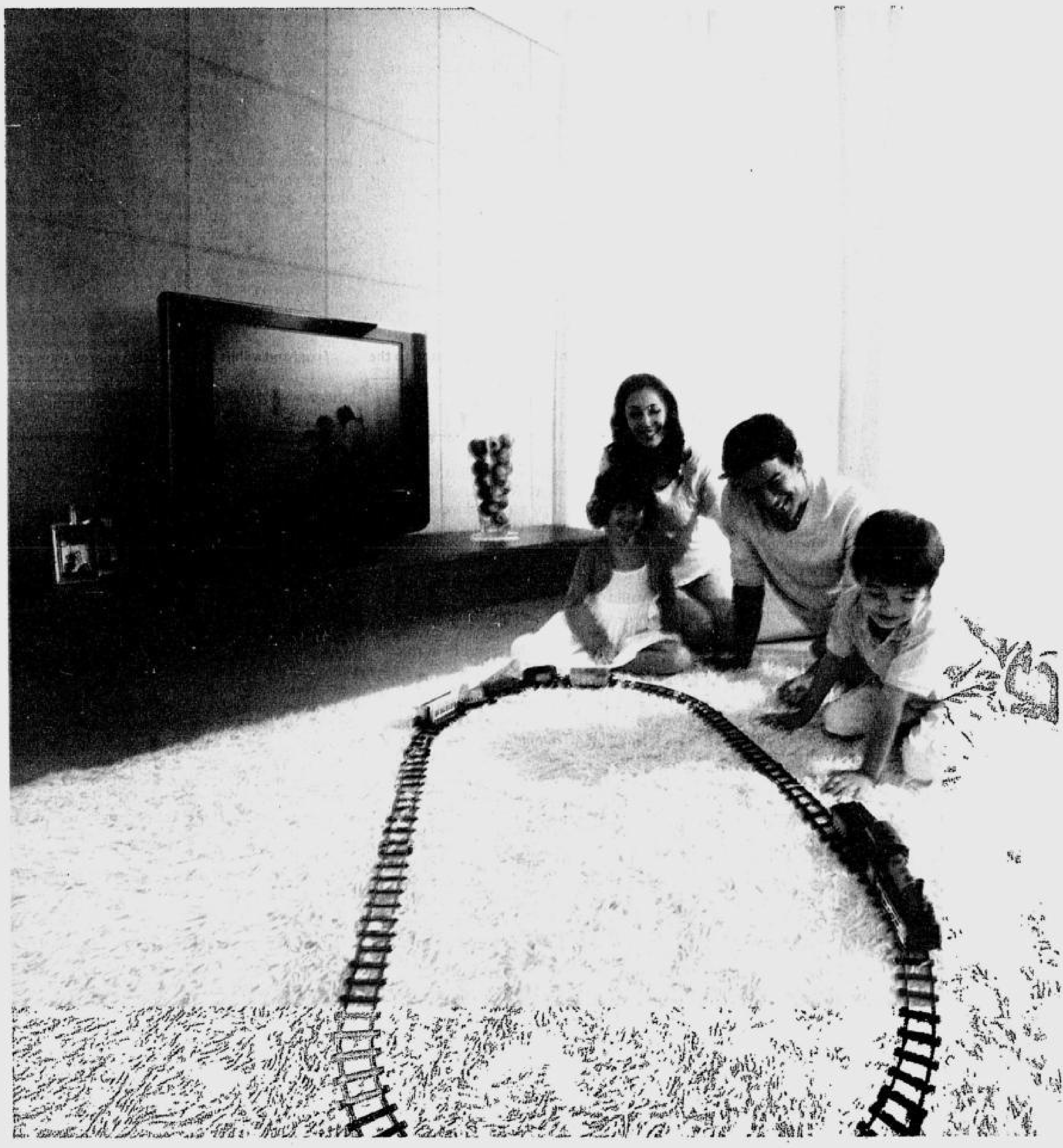

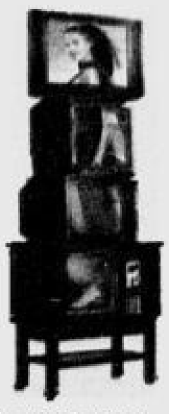

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Evacuees return to ransacked homes

LIANGA, SURIGAO DEL SUR—MANOBO EVAcuees from 12 villages of Andap Valley here have finally returned home to their communities on Thursday, barely four days before Christmas, only to find their shelters and schools already ransacked.

They are blaming soldiers for the pillage, but a military spokesperson denied that the troops took anything from the villages.

More than 2,000 evacuees were escorted by different groups, including those from the religious community.

Those who lived in the farthest sub village of Han-ayan walked for about 16 kilometers from the barangay gymnasium in Diatagon, where they stayed for the past few weeks.

Another group, who sought refuge at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Tandag City, had to hike 3 km, with children in tow, only to find that their houses and two schools in disarray.

Books and other school supplies were scattered everywhere as if a tornado or a freak weather phenomenon swept through the place.

Norma Ampis, executive director of the Catholic Church's Tribal Filipino Program in Surigao del Sur, said most of the houses in the 12 villages—which residents had abandoned since November when the military launched a big offensive against communist rebels—"were not spared from being ransacked."

Chickens and hogs left behind by the villagers during the chaos were all gone, she said.

Ampis said the villagers believed that soldiers, who encamped in the areas, were responsible for the loss of the animals.

Their rice supply was also gone. she said.

Maj. Samuel Sagun, spokesperson of the military's 4th Infantry Division based in Cagayan de Oro City, denied that the soldiers took anything.

Instead, he accused New People's Army (NPA) rebels of pillaging the village in search of food.

"Our soldiers have their own food supply. The NPA rebels are on the run and they do not have enough food. They might have taken the animals and the other food disappearing from the villages," Sagun said.

He urged the villagers to file a proper complaint instead of complaining to the media.

"For us, these allegations remain black propaganda because nobody was stepping forward to file a complaint," he said. ***Chris V. Panganiban, Inquirer Mindanao, with a report from Joselle Badilla***

NEWSBRIEFS

Skeletons found in mass grave

ILAGAN, Isabela—Policemen and Army soldiers unearthed on Dec. 20 skeletons of eight men believed killed by New People's Army rebels at a mass grave in Barangay Viga in Lasam, Cagayan.

Lt. Col. Francis Lardizabal, commander of the Army's 21st Infantry Battalion, said the skeletons belonged to eight men, mostly sellers of clay pots from Isabela, who were reported missing last year in Cagayan.

They were discovered after villagers in Viga had told authorities about bodies that were buried there by suspected NPA rebels.

Lardizabal said the clay pot sellers were allegedly killed after they were suspected of being informants of the military.

Senior Supt. Dominador Aquino, Isabela police director, said some of the skeletons were identified by relatives as those of Guillermo Macapallag, Silviano Guiyab and Antonio Datul, all residents of Poblacion 3 in Santa Maria, Isabela.

Meanwhile, the body of a platoon leader of the NPA's southern front was exhumed on Dec. 16 in Barangay San Miguel in Echague, Isabela, according to Army officials.

Roberto Benedicto, alias Commander Rey, was killed in a clash with Army soldiers in Barangay Mabbayad in Echague early this month.

Villamor Visaya Jr., Inquirer Northern Luzon

3 hurt in Compostela blast

TAGUM CITY—Three persons, including a woman, were wounded in a grenade explosion that occurred near a banana plantation in Nabunturan, Compostela Valley province on Dec. 19, police said.

Supt. Ronald dela Rosa, Compostela Valley police chief, said the victims were in a store near ECB Agri-Ventures banana plantation in Barangay Cabidianan, when the lone suspect, identified as Raul Resma, suddenly arrived.

Dela Rosa said Resma tossed the explosive before fleeing.

The injured victims were identified as Melinda Resma, 40, the suspect's sister; and village watchmen Marnie Redondo and Jimmy Dumaog.

Dela Rosa said the suspect was later apprehended.

Dela Rosa said the attack was related to a land dispute.

Frinston Lim, Inquirer Mindanao

Fires destroy more than P30M

DAVAO CITY—Three fires hit the city's downtown area this week, destroying more than P30 million in pieces of property.

City Fire Marshall Wilberto Rico Kwantiu said no one was hurt in the fires.

The first fire broke out on Dec. 17 along Gempesaw Street while five apartment buildings along Mapa Street were razed the next day.

On Dec. 19 dawn, an electrical short-circuit triggered a fire that burned the Davao Lumber building along Cabaguio Street, Kwantiu said.

He said the fire department has been reminding building owners to check their electrical connections and urged residents to be extra careful, especially during the Christmas season.

Dennis Jay Santos, Inquirer Mindanao

Prank calls pester Ozamiz cops

OZAMIZ CITY—Police here have complained about the barrage of prank calls and text messages they receive in their hotlines.

The hotlines, set up about two weeks ago with the help of the city government, were meant to provide easy access to law enforcers during emergencies.

Senior Insp. Joey Ampong, assistant city police chief, told reporters that most of the pranksters were children toying with their home phones.

He said most of the time, policemen on duty scamper to answer calls made to the hotlines only to find out that playful children are on the other end of the line.

Ampong called on parents to impose discipline among their children on telephone use, especially the need to respect the police hotline numbers.

Ryan D. Rosauro, Inquirer Mindanao

Ex-cop nabbed for abduction

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna—A former policeman and his two associates, including a civil engineer, were arrested after they abducted and tried to kill a man they suspected as the one who stole the batteries of their delivery trucks in San Pedro, Laguna on Dec. 11, police said.

Police identified the suspects as former PO3 Edgardo Marin, 41, a discharged Quezon policeman and resident of Lucena City; civil engineer Maximo Banaag, 46, of Tayabas, Quezon; and Enrique Samonte, 37, also from Lucena City.

Two other companions of the suspects were able to elude arrest and are now being hunted.

Supt. Jolly Dizon, San Pedro police chief, said the suspects seized victim Godofredo Salvador Jr., 29, from his house in Sitio Maligaya 1, Barangay San Vicente, San Pedro town at 7 p.m., hours after he supposedly stole the batteries of two delivery trucks owned by the suspects.

Dizon said the trucks were parked near the San Pedro Water District office in Barangay San Vicente.

After taking Salvador at gunpoint, the suspects forced the victim into a car and brought him to an open lot in Gen. Mariano Alvarez town in Cavite.

Marlon Ramos, Inquirer Southern Luzon

Guard dead in bank heist

TAGUM CITY—Unidentified armed men shot dead a security guard before fleeing with at least P1.3 million in cash from a cooperative in Davao del Norte during a heist early morning Dec. 20.

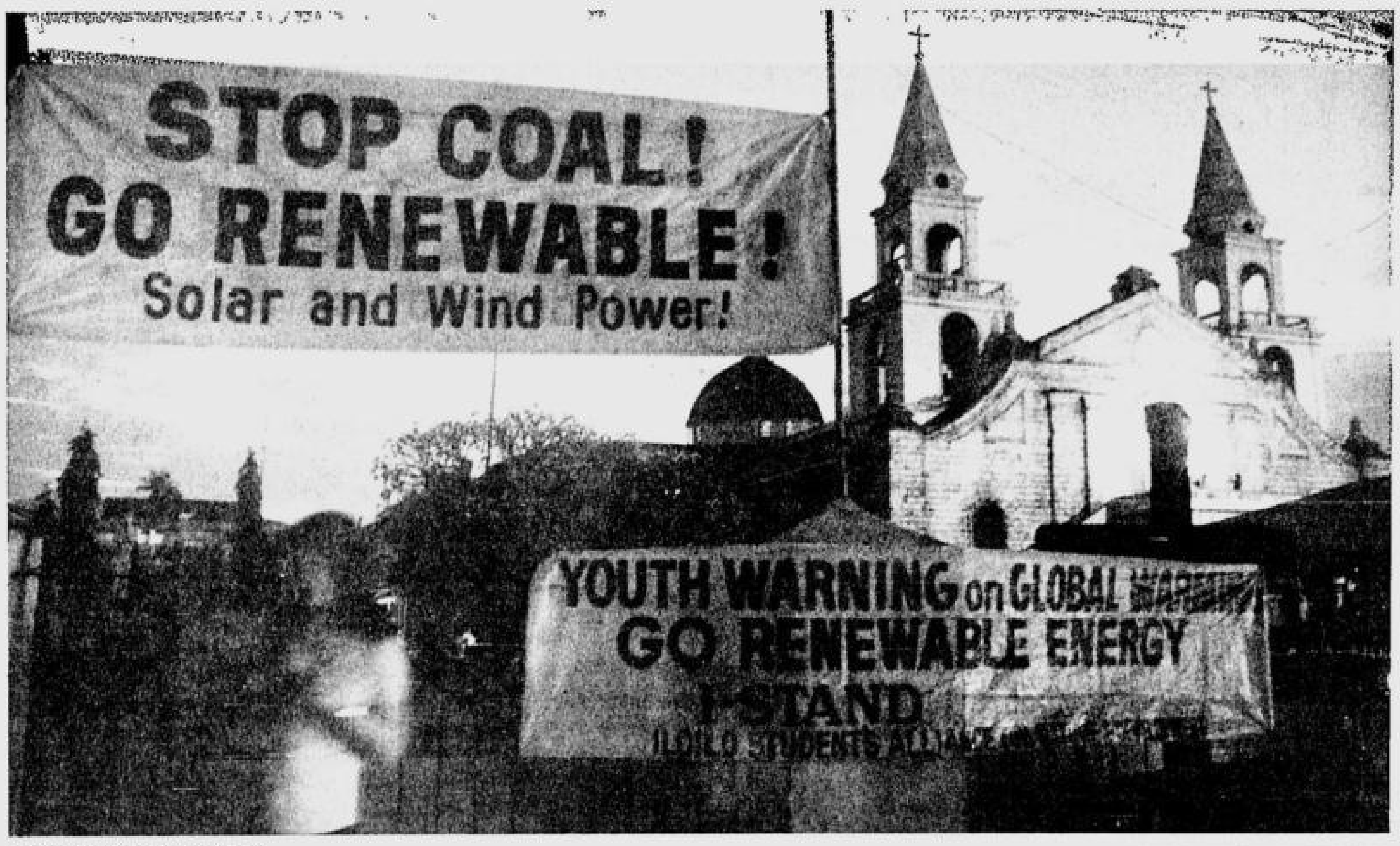
Davao del Norte police chief Senior Supt. Benilito Bianzon said the perpetrators shot and killed Jecolo Panes before barging into a branch of the Kapalong Cooperative in Sto. Tomas town at about 7 a.m.

He said he had ordered the province's Scene of the Crime Operation unit to conduct a follow-up investigation to determine the identity of the robbers.

"We could not determine yet what group perpetrated the heist," Bianzon said.

Bianzon said he also directed the chiefs of police in the province's towns and cities to be on alert against robbers.

Edwin O. Fernandez, Inquirer Mindanao



HOLIDAY MESSAGE

ARNOLD ALMACEN/INQUIRER VISAYAS

Opponents of a plan to build a coal power plant in Iloilo City take advantage of the expected surge of churchgoers at the Jaro Cathedral for dawn Mass to deliver their message through streamers demanding a stop to the use of coal and a shift to alternative energy sources.

Raps filed vs Egyptian linked to bomb plot

By Jeoffrey Maitem
Inquirer Mindanao

COTABATO CITY—CHARGES of possession of explosives were filed against the Egyptian arrested in a raid on Campo Muslim here on Dec. 19.

Chief Supt. Joel Goltiao, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao police chief, said the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) filed the charges against Mohammed El-Sayed at a local court on Thursday.

"Although he (El-Sayed) will not admit the accusation against him, the fact is, we recovered explosives," Goltiao said.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) earlier defended the foreigner.

Eid Kabalu, MILF civil-military operations chief, said El-Sayed was an Islamic missionary teaching at the Mahad Islamic School in Barangay Mother Bagua and not a bomb expert, contrary to police and military claims.

Lt. Col. Julieto Ando, spokesperson of the Army's 6th Infantry Division based here, said El-Sayed did not resist arrest when a raiding team of the CIDG, city police and Task Force Tugis went to his house near the Maahad Islamic School in Campo Muslim at about 8 a.m.

"The raid was conducted following weeks of surveillance on El-Sayed's activities. It was backed up by a warrant," he said.

Ando said that during the raid, soldiers and policemen seized materials for fabrication of homemade bombs and some reading materials on religious extremism.

"Recovered from El-Sayed's hideout were highly combustible charges, detonating cords for improvised explosives, a 60-mm mortar ammunition, nine-volt batteries and schematic wiring diagrams for battery-operated blasting mechanisms for bombs," he said.

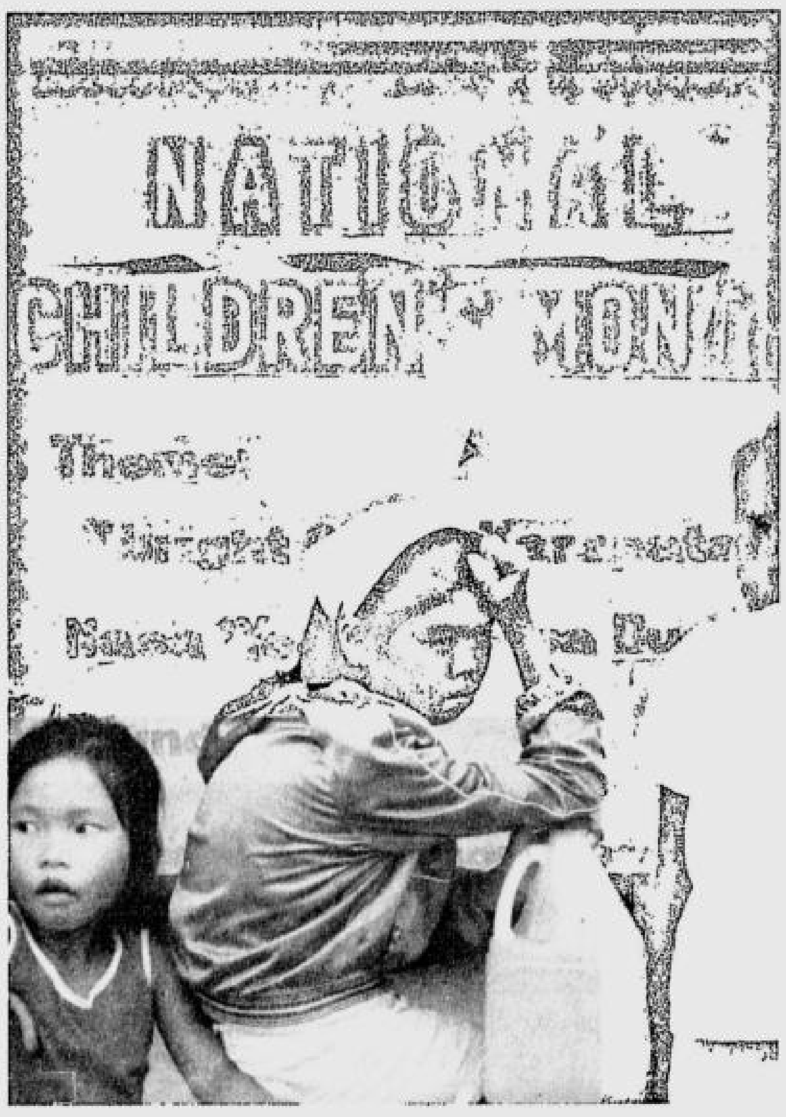
Chief Supt. Willie Dangane, city police chief, said the suspect was planning to make an improvised explosive device that would be set off here before Christmas.

But Dangane did not specify how the police came to that conclusion and which area was being targeted.

Aside from the bomb materials, Ando said El-Sayed yielded a manual of the MILF's organizational structure.

But Kabalu said witnesses told MILF investigators that no explosive was found in the house during the raid.

No end in sight for delay in school repair



CHILDREN are the ones who suffer most from displacement as a result of typhoons in the Bicol region.

NIÑO JESUS ORBETA/INQUIRER SOUTHERN LUZON

LEGAZPI CITY—NO QUICK end is in sight for the repair and construction of schools that were damaged and destroyed by successive typhoons in Bicol as the Department of Education said it lacked P850 million more for the projects.

The DepEd regional office received P1.2 billion to build and repair the schools.

But Celedonio Layon, DepEd regional director, said that as of Dec. 15, 203 classrooms were still under construction and 792 were being repaired under the Bicol Calamity Assistance, Emergency Response project of the national government.

Eight school buildings have yet to be built and 107 others have yet to be constructed, he said.

Cost of school damage and destruction was estimated at P2.4 billion, although it wasn't clear how the figure was arrived at.

Layon said the lack of funds meant only that not all schools would be repaired.

He said the DepEd had not requested additional funds.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, in a speech at the regional peace and security assembly in Masbate on Dec. 13, scolded education officials after learning that the school rehabilitation project was unfinished a year after the typhoons struck.

"Our goal now is to finish the rehabilitation of schools, up to what the funds will allow, before end of March in 2008," Layon told the INQUIRER.

He said that as of Dec. 15, 73 percent of ongoing school construction had been completed.

Damaged schools that have not been demolished to clear lots for new schools were counted as uncompleted repair work, he said.

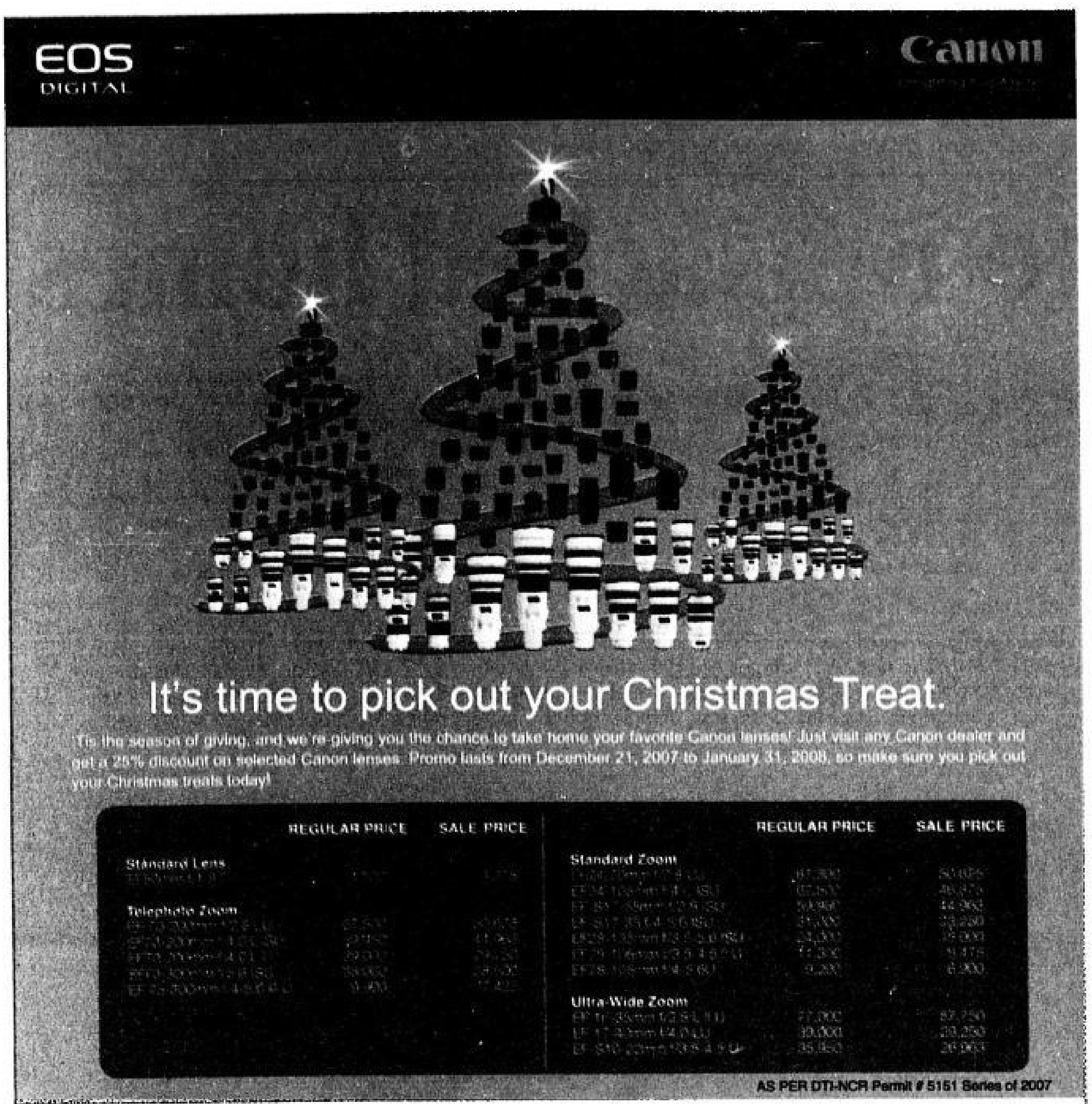
The project was also hounded by bidding failures and fighting between government soldiers and communist guerrillas.

Layon said some contractors were being forced by rebels to pay taxes. This report has yet to be verified, however.

At a resettlement village in Taysan, a makeshift structure still serves as classroom for students displaced from their school in Barangay Padang, a lahar zone.

The grade school pupils have to endure the heat from iron sheets that served as roofing.

Without concrete flooring, the classroom would turn muddy during rainy days. ***Ephraim Aguilar, Inquirer Southern Luzon***



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[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
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	REGULAR PRICE	SALE PRICE
Standard Zoom		
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[illegible]	59,950	44,963
[illegible]	31,000	23,250
[illegible]	24,000	18,000
[illegible]	11,300	8,475
[illegible]	9,200	6,900
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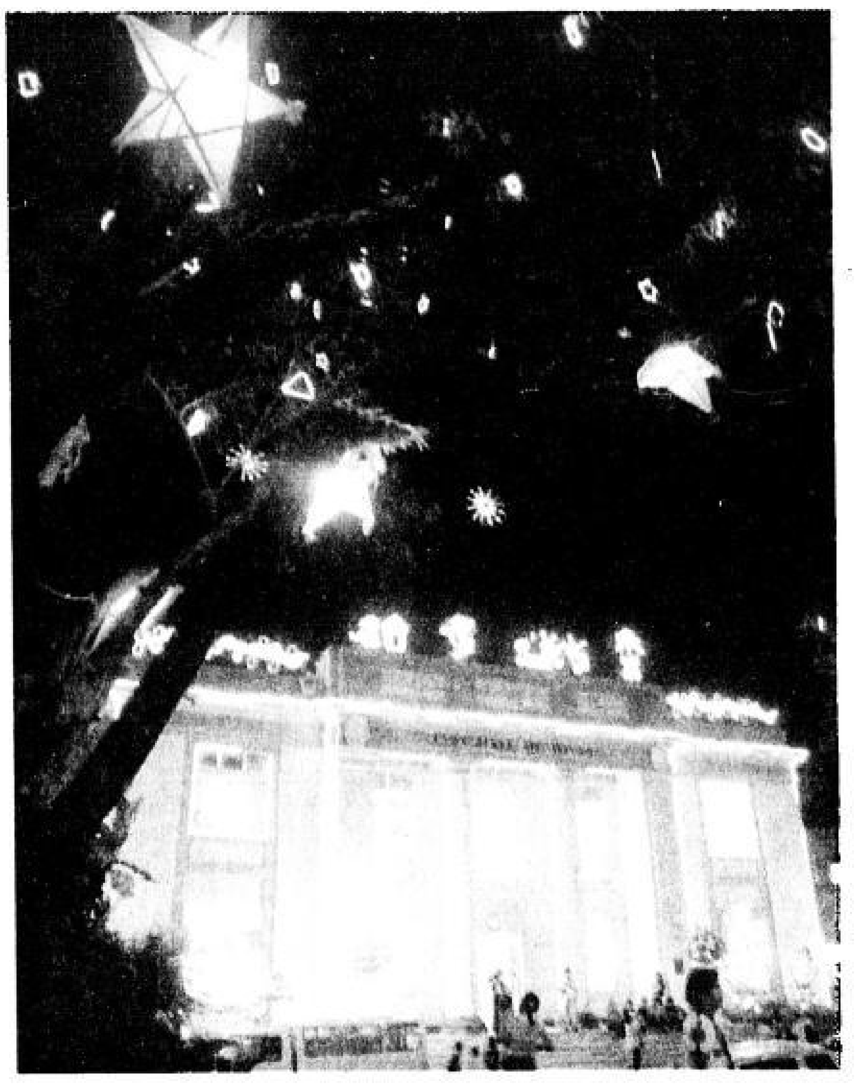


DAVAO AGLOW Christmas ornaments at the Quezon Park and City Hall in Davao City help bring in the holiday mood. Residents and visitors flock to the area to view the decorations. City officials have made it a tradition to bring out the decorations every year during the Yuletide season. BING GONZALES/ INQUIRER MINDANAO

Case filed vs mayor over relocation plan

SUBIC, ZAMBALES—THE PROVINCIAL government's Task Force Hanjin has filed a complaint against the mayor of this town for his alleged refusal to release documents related to the relocation project for 470 families displaced by a Korean shipbuilding firm.

The complaint, filed at the Ombudsman for Luzon on Dec. 18, said Mayor Jeffrey Khonghun violated Republic Act No. 6713, or the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees.

In a three-page complaint, Ramon Lacbain II, Carlos Castillo Jr., Belen Figueras, David Maceda, Andres Sazon and Ruben Gaduang said Khonghun failed to answer the task force's requests to release the documents on the Agusuhin relocation project.

The requests, contained in letters dated Sept. 3 and Oct. 18, went unanswered despite the lapse of almost two months, they said.

The law requires public officials and employees to "act promptly on letters and requests" by the public within 15 working days from the date those were received."

It also "obliges public officials and employees to "make documents accessible to the public."

In a phone interview, Khonghun said he could not comment on the complaint because he had not received a copy of it. "I will make a statement once I receive a copy," he told the INQUIRER.

He confirmed receiving "some letter-requests" from the task force but did not say why his office failed to release the papers.

Lacbain, chair of the task force formed by Gov. Amor Deloso in July, said the documents could clarify and answer the issues and concerns raised by residents.

They include certified copies of the program of work, building permits, change order, certificate of acceptance, lists of actions undertaken, subdivision plan of the relocation site, environmental compliance certificates, and certificate of titles or awards.

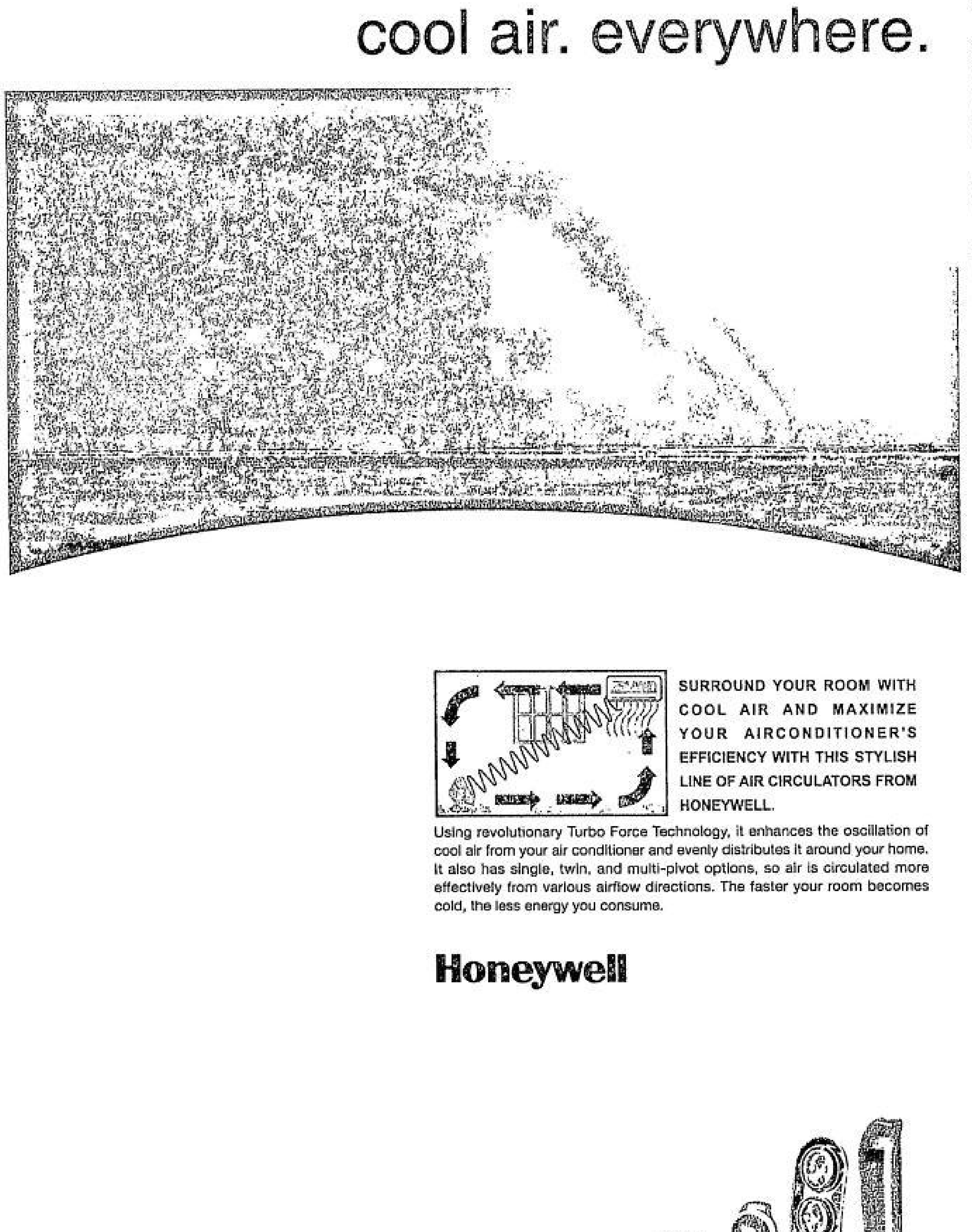
The task force reported that four structures went unfinished, 23 others were labeled "none," three were considered finished while two school buildings were marked "collapsed."

A Malacañang source said a DPWH team estimated the costs of the existing structures at only P3 million.

Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Co. Ltd. purchased P18 million worth of construction materials in May 2006 to build the relocation site. It had earlier spent P24 million more for compensation to the settlers.

Khonghun, as mayor, oversaw the project while former Gov. Vicente Magsaysay admitted to supervising the payment for damages. Both tasks were supposed to be done by the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority.

Tonette Orejas, Inquirer Central Luzon



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RP gov't teams preparing for climate change havoc

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—THE country's disaster response and management agencies are preparing for the adverse impact of climate change on weather patterns.

National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) executive officer Glen Rabonza said the NDCC expected stronger typhoons to batter the country.

"Even without climate change, we are already battered by natural calamities. So this could get worse," Rabonza said in an interview.

In November, three typhoons slammed the country—"Kabayan," "Lando" and "Mina."

The environment and development organization Germanwatch last week reported that the Philippines was No. 1 in the 2006 Global Climate Risk Index, which measures the amount of risks a country faces from storms and natural calamities.

This was a jump from the ranking of 51 in 2005.

Germanwatch reported that storms in the Philippines resulted in at least 1,267 deaths and losses totaling $4.5 billion.

HUNDREDS of schoolchildren join a parade organized by the environmental group Greenpeace in Quezon City. JOAN BONDOC

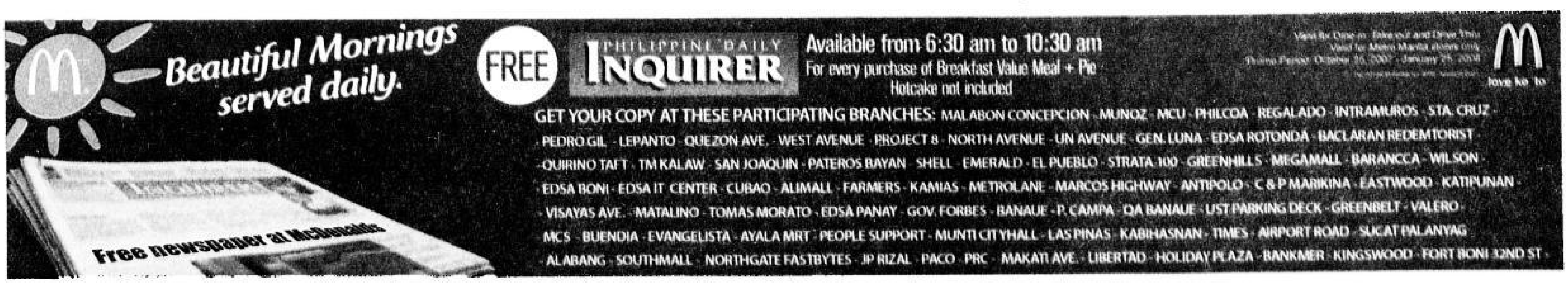
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a scientific intergovernmental body, has issued four reports citing general increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising sea temperatures due to the warming of the climate system.

"We must be very cautious not to cause unnecessary alarm … This is the importance of a scientific basis for assessments and corresponding policy decisions," said Rabonza.

He said at least two research projects were ongoing to establish the impact of climate change on the Philippines.

The World Bank-funded project started this year and will be completed in three years.

The $15-million project, partly funded by the Global Environment Fund, seeks to develop a systematic diagnosis of climate-related problems and the design of cost-effective measures.



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LOPEZ-JAENA AT 151

The hero still isn't home

By Hazel P. Villa
Iloilo City

All deserve your kiss
The heroes of the bolo or the pen,
All advance the course of progress
With the rifle or the word in print.

If the soldier in the thick of combat
Proves heroic brandishing his arm,
He too is brave in the invisible fight
Who with an idea destroys a throne.
—Graciano Lopez-Jaena

DECEMBER WINDS whipped up the Philippine flags in Jaro Plaza in Iloilo City, reminding the public of the 151st birth anniversary on Dec. 18 of Ilonggo hero Graciano Lopez-Jaena, the "Demosthenes of the Philippines" and the "trailblazer" of the Great Triumvirate of the Propaganda Movement.

Previous Lopez-Jaena birth anniversary celebrations set on the erroneous date of Dec. 17 has already been corrected by the research of local historians.

The public plaza of Jaro, called Plaza Rizal for more than eight decades, has been renamed Lopez-Jaena Park by the city council only in 1986 despite having the life-size monument of Lopez-Jaena standing there since the early 1900s.

Despite the honors accorded the great propagandist, it could not be said that "home is the hero" since his remains have yet to be buried in his beloved hometown.

Mia Lopez-Cruz, a great granddaughter of Lopez-Jaena, said her family was still looking for the remains of the hero who, at age 18 years, wrote "Fray Botod" that exposed the abuses of Spanish friars and made a name for himself upon reaching Spain in the 1880s.

Neglected

Lopez-Jaena's death was not at all spectacular as befits a hero. He died of tuberculosis on Jan. 20, 1896, in a hospital run by the Daughters of Charity in Barcelona.

The hero, first to arrive in Spain to launch the Propaganda Movement, was also the first to die—buried the following day in an unmarked grave at the Cementerio del Sud-Oeste in the same Spanish city, according to historical documents.

Lopez-Cruz told Iloilo media that the search for her grandfather's remains was being initiated by the National Historical Institute and that the family relied on the media to inform succeeding generations of the hero's contributions to the country.

"The neglect of Lopez-Jaena is indeed a sad fact. For while un-honored and unsung in death, in life Lopez-Jaena was a very willing patriot who never demurred to serve nor counted the cost in his service to the motherland. As a matter of fact, historians agree that he was the first Filipino patriot to step into the Propaganda field to seek reform for his countrymen," wrote Ilonggo historian and former vice governor Demy Sonza in his paper, "Lopez-Jaena deserves higher honors."

The other firebrands of the Propaganda Movement were Dr. Jose Rizal, who arrived in Spain in 1882, and Marcelo del Pilar, who joined them in 1889.

This triumvirate pushed the Spanish government for reforms in the Philippines and, in the process, sowed the seeds for a revolution back home through their writings smuggled by a propaganda committee.

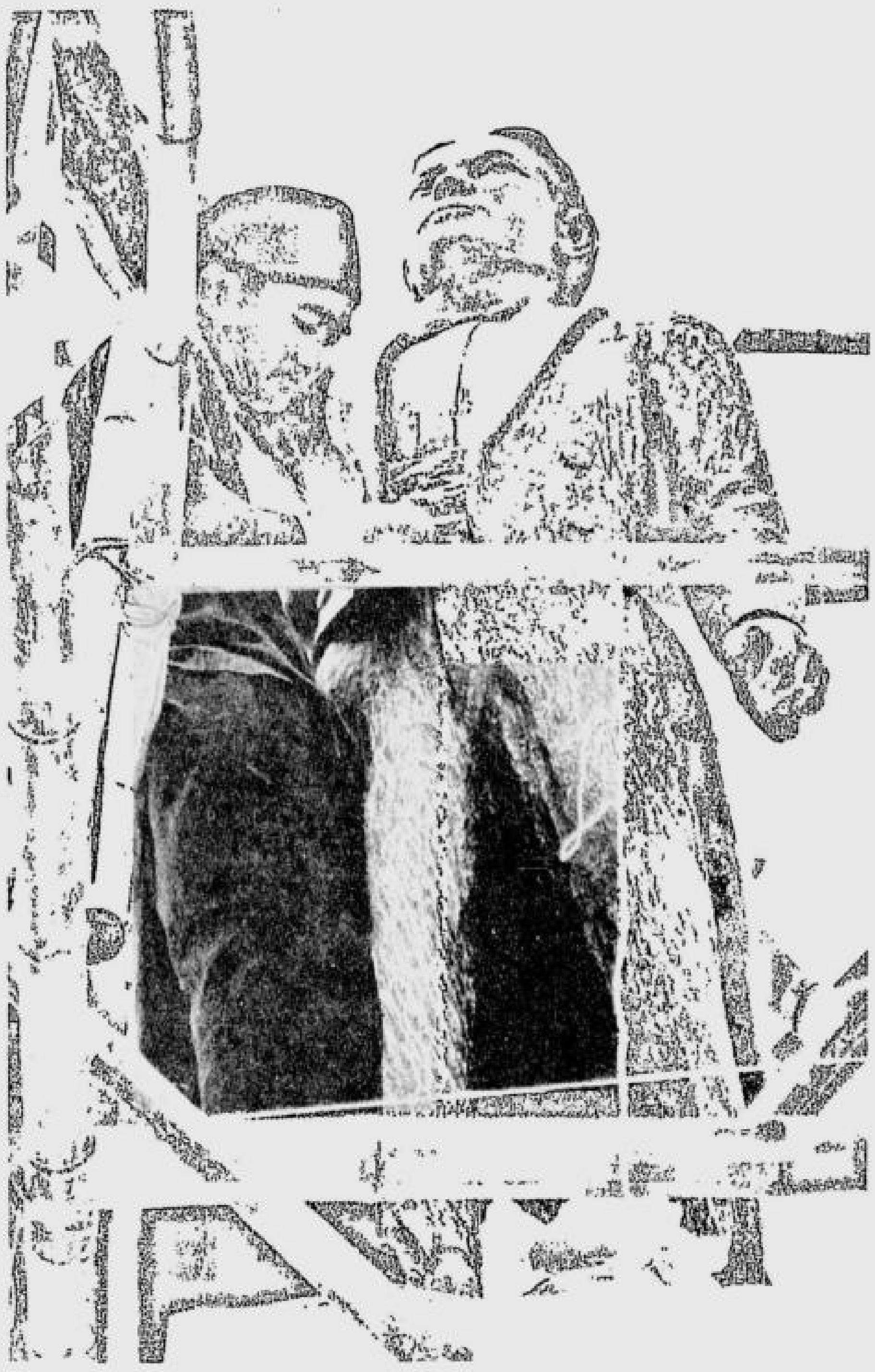
Writings

Lopez-Jaena's writings and oratory brought to the attention of Spain the pathetic sociopolitical situation in the Philippines. The call for reforms became even louder when Lopez-Jaena in his mid-twenties founded and became the first editor of the newspaper La Solidaridad in February 1889, the mouthpiece of the Propaganda Movement.

"Whether writing for periodicals or speaking from the platform, Lopez-Jaena extolled the virtues of the Filipino people and the beauty and wealth of Las Islas Filipinas. He advocated freedom of speech, of the press, of peaceful assembly, and of commerce, so that the Philippines might move on the path of progress. He wrote prolifically for at least fifteen different periodicals in Europe from Spain to England," wrote Sonza, who is also the co-chair of the Western Visayas Historical and Cultural Council.

What Lopez-Jaena stood and fought for as he fanned the flames of freedom in his home country while in Spain may not have cost him his life, but the same fervor in the present times of the journalist living dangerously could have bonnet-clad, motorcycle men pumping bullets into him.

"Bear in mind that journalism is now a risky profession. If he (Lopez-Jaena) were here at this time, he could have been killed. Why was he free to write all these things? Remember that in the 1880s when Lopez-Jaena arrived in Spain, the spirit of liberalism was prevailing but the Philippines was so far that ideas on the freedom of speech did not reach it. He wanted to bring the advocacy of freedom to the Philippines from Spain," said Sonza.


A REPAIRMAN brings back the sheen to the bronze-painted, cast-iron monument of hero-propagandist Graciano Lopez-Jaena, who celebrated his 151th birth anniversary on Dec. 18 at the Jaro Plaza in Iloilo City now named after him. HAZEL P. VILLA

The writings of Lopez-Jaena were less fiery than his orations, but they were "no less beautiful, clear, direct, logical, courageous and hard-hitting," wrote Sonza in his third edition of the Lopez-Jaena biography, "Mightier than the Sword, A Biography of Graciano Lopez-Jaena" that was first published in 2002 in Iloilo City.

Reading through the life of Lopez-Jaena the reformer and journalist, one sees a pattern of hewing to the truth and what is good for the Filipinos no matter the cost.

Scathing articles

His scathing articles and oratories about the abuses of the friars, as well as his call for reforms from the Spanish government, led to his getting persecuted and he had to flee for his life—forcing him to sail to Spain where the journalist grabbed the sprouting liberalism there as his stage for exposing the evils hounding his motherland.

Sonza said that to make Lopez-Jaena stop writing about the abuses and excesses of the friars, the bishop of Oviedo offered him a good position that would comfortably support him all his life. To this offer, Lopez-Jaena answered that his life belonged to the Philippines and not to the religious orders.

"My intelligence and my pen belong to the Philippines and not to any foreign country," he was reported to have said when a Spanish-language periodical in New York, through the American Embassy in Madrid, offered him its editorship with an initial salary of $200 a month plus shares in the profits.

People find refuge in nature parks of Samar town

By Vicente S. Labro
Basey, Samar

WITH THE HEAT FELT despite the rainy months, people seek refuge in cool places, many of them ending up in the comfort of mother nature.

In this ancient town of Basey, Samar, the 840-hectare Sohoton Natural Bridge National Park and some nearby areas have always been the favorite of local and foreign tourists.

Established as a national park on July 19, 1935, Sohoton boasts of several caves, waterfalls, and a lush forest inhabited by indigenous flora and fauna, including the endangered Rufous Hornbill, Philippine Tarsier and Blue-naped Parrot.

"Sohoton Natural Bridge National park showcases the grandeur of natural resources of Samar Island and of Region 8 (Eastern Visayas)," according to a brochure of the Environment Management and Protected Areas Services of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

"It is known for its natural beauty expressed in its caves, subterranean rivers, waterfalls and unique limestone formation. It is an idyllic place for recreation."

Named after the stone bridge that connects two mountain ridges, the Sohoton national park has five caves—Panhulugan I and II, Sohoton, Bugasan and Capigtan—the 50-meter Cabungaan Waterfall, and the river passing through a small passage leading to the natural bridge. (In Waray, "*sohoton*" means to pass through).

Caves

The caves feature tunnels with cool air, stalactites and stalagmites of different shapes and sizes, some of them resembling the Banaue Rice Terraces, the Great Wall of China, a Harem Pavilion and an amphitheater.

The park has been declared a protected area under the National Integrated Protected Areas System (Nipas) and is under the protection and management of the DENR. Located about 25 kilometers northeast of the town proper, it can be reached in one-and-a-half hours by motorboat from the Basey wharf.

Another favorite destination is the Rawis Cave, about 20 km from the town proper, which boasts of exquisitely shaped stalactites and stalagmites, including those that resemble a picture frame, a statue of the Virgin Mary, a natural bathtub, a statue of the Madonna and cave pearls.

Its entrance is only about 600 meters away from Sitio Rawis in Barangay Guirang, The Balantak Resort has a waterfall, natural pool, manmade swimming pools and rich vegetation that cushions the summer heat. It can reached in 30 minutes by land from the town proper.

Unlike the Sohoton national park that is being managed by a government agency, the resort and caves in Rawis are run by the Rawis Community-based Resource Management Association (RCRMA).

Income

The people's organization, formed in 2000 with 76 members, shares the income derived from the entrance and other fees with the municipal government.

The crew of for-hire motorboats are registered with the Basey Tourism Center headed by Melfa Cabaquit. Boat rental ranges from P900 to P1,200 for five to seven persons, according to Joel Manacdo, a staff member.

Visitors also have to pay the municipal tourism permit at P50 per group not exceeding eight persons. Those going to explore the Sohoton caves are charged P8 per person entrance fee ($2 for foreigners), the P200 guide fee, and P300 lamp fee.

Those bound for Rawis Cave pay the same amount, except for the entrance fee, which is P20 or $2 (for foreigners) per head.

According to Manacdo, motorcycles transport visitors to the Balantak resort at P50 per person. "Or they can hire multi-cab or other vehicles if they want to," he added.

A bonus for tourists is that while in the town proper, they can visit the centuries-old Basey Church or witness some people weaving straw mats. Mat weaving or "banig"-making is an age-old tradition there.

Basey, a coastal town 33 km from Tacloban City, can be reached from Tacloban by a 45-minute land trip passing through the picturesque San Juanico Bridge. Tacloban, on the other hand, is just an hour's flight from Manila.

The thriving "firecracker capital" of Cebu

By Jolene R. Bulambot
Cebu City

FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS, BARANGAY BABAG 1 IN Lapu-Lapu City on Mactan Island has been known as the "Firecracker Capital" of Cebu because of its thriving pyrotechnic industry.

All year round, there is no stopping the manufacturing of pyrotechnics that come in various sizes and shapes.

Orders came not only from nearby provinces like Bohol, Leyte and Negros but also from as far as the cities of Zamboanga, Cagayan de Oro, Ozamiz and Davao in Mindanao.

Despite the intensified campaign to regulate the manufacture of firecrackers in this barangay, many residents continue to risk their lives by making inferior firecrackers, with many doing it inside their homes.

Senior Supt. Lyndon Lawas, chief of the Firearms Explosives Security Agencies and Guards Supervision Section (FESAGSS) in Central Visayas, said they have intensified their monitoring campaign against unscrupulous pyrotechnics makers in Babag 1.

Just last Dec. 14, police confiscated two sacks of potassium nitrate, a black powder ingredient for making pyrotechnics, along with assorted firecrackers of inferior quality several yards from the barangay hall, Lawas said.

No one was arrested since the suspects fled when they sensed policemen arriving, he said.

Lawas said the incident caused concern to the authorities because it only meant that the problem on the manufacturing of pyrotechnics continued to thrive.

Illegal

"We are really investigating what happened because the barangay officials and even the residents already assured us of their cooperation. What we have gathered based on intelligence reports is that those suspects were subcontracted to make firecrackers and that is not allowed under our laws," he said.

Of the 6,000 residents in Babag 1, 90 percent are engaged in the manufacture of pyrotechnics. But only three are licensed, Julian Pongasi, 73, also known as the "Father of Firecrackers" in Cebu, told the INQUIRER.

What is more frightening, he said, is that some residents continued to "secretly" make firecrackers inside their houses or in places not suitable for such activity. The law requires that a firecracker factory must be 300 meters away from the nearest residence, Pongasi said.

Pongasi, who owns JP Fireworks, said the rest of the residents in Babag 1 who are into firecracker manufacturing are operating without license and permits.

"I am not concerned about the competition but what is scaring me is the risk it poses to public safety if they continue to engage in this activity. Some of the firecrackers they make are of inferior quality and that is dangerous," he said.

Pongasi said the business is very lucrative because of the orders that come from other areas.

In his case, Pongasi said he makes at least P1 million a year from his firecrackers.

The orders, particularly during the holiday season, are so big that he often ships the firecrackers in container vans particularly in Mindanao.

His wife, Grace, a barangay official in Babag 1, however laments that the name of legal pyrotechnics makers are being blemished by the unscrupulous pyrotechnic makers whose substandard products become the common cause of accidents and loss of lives.

Grace said they were coordinating with police and Bureau of Fire Protection officials to help educate the residents as to the importance of complying with Republic Act 7173, the law that regulates the manufacture, distribution and sale of firecrackers.

In the past, residents were dependent on fishing but when her husband started making firecrackers, such as Super Lolo, Kwities and Judas belt, the business grew.

"We were happy that many of our neighbors were benefiting from our business. They grew up with us in this business but when the government started to regulate the manufacturing of firecrackers, they found it hard to cope with the stringent requirements," she said.

Big players

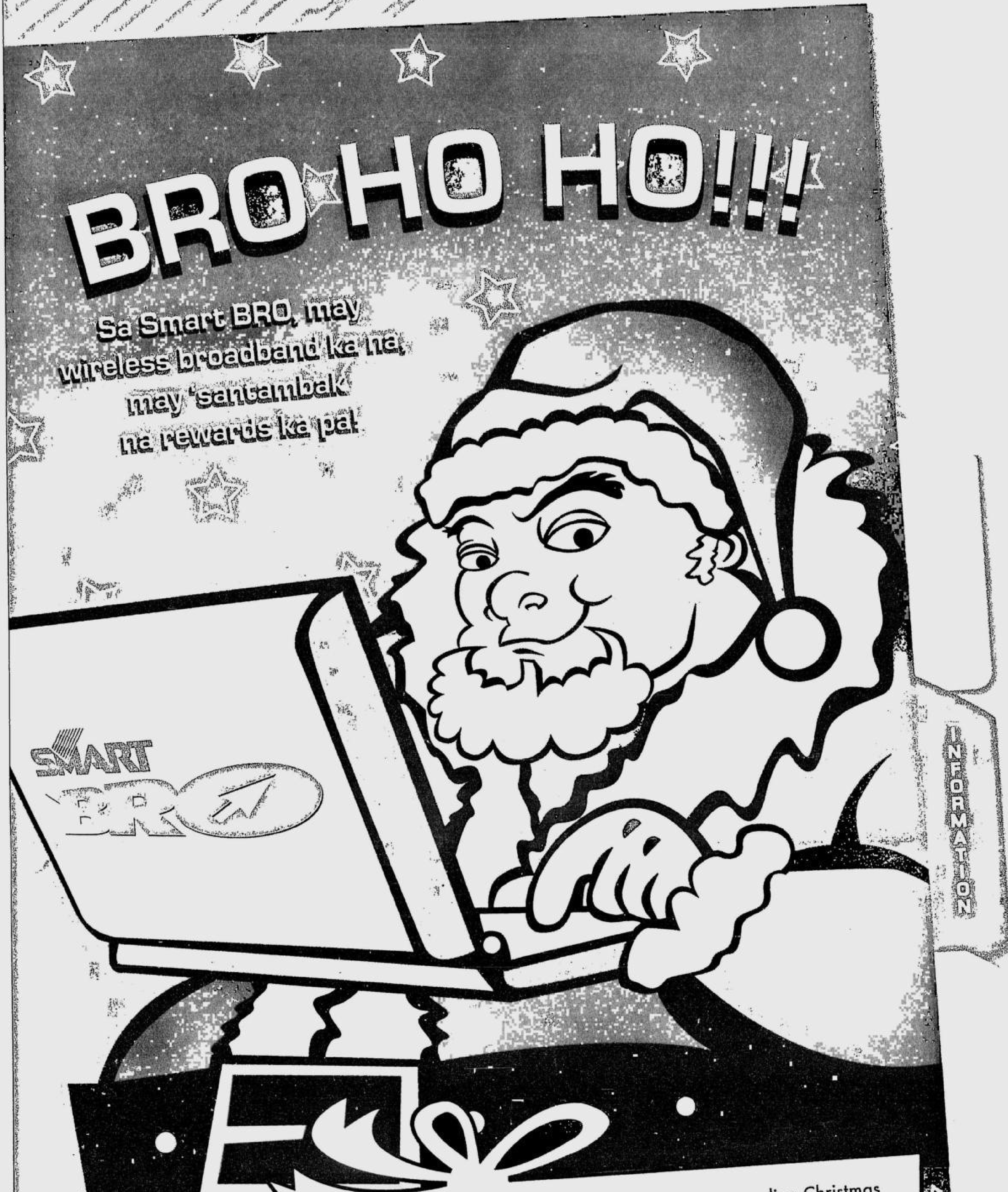
Estella Rivera, a firecracker retailer for 12 years, said the small players find it hard to cope with the increasing prices of chemicals and materials used to make firecrackers.

However, Rivera said they were still grateful with the thriving business because it gives them a source of livelihood.

Since Dec. 15, about 130 stalls along the stretch of Babag 1 and Kinalumsan Street display firecrackers.

Lawas said they have issued at least 136 retailer's license to applicants who have complied with the requirements in selling firecrackers but only on a limited period due to the Christmas holidays.

"We are very strict this time and we have subjected the applicants to stringent requirements and so far only 136 have been issued retailer's license," he said.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GUYITO AT MASCOTS PARADE
The INQUIRER's well loved mascot, Guyito, strikes a pose for photographers at the Krismaskot 2007 parade Dec. 16 on the Baywalk along Roxas Boulevard in Manila. The 3rd Manila Christmas Family Festival was a whole day family affair presented in cooperation with various food companies, Pagcor, Meralco, the City of Manila and the country's top newspapers and radio stations. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Shabu raw materials seized

Illegal substance found in 2 vans at South Harbor

By Margaux C. Ortiz

CUSTOMS OFFICIALS INTERcepted yesterday at South Harbor's Port of Manila several drums of chemicals that could be turned into P700 million worth of methamphetamine hydrochloride (shabu). Bureau of Customs (BoC) Commissioner Napoleon Morales, who inspected the seized materials with Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) chief Dionisio Santiago, said the chemicals were hidden inside two container vans. Morales said the container that arrived Nov. 28 from Taiwan revealed "suspicious images" prompting BoC x-ray field officers to conduct a thorough examination.

They found eight drums of chemicals, 14 cans of colorless liquids, eight cans of red powder, 10 boxes of pornographic DVDs and two machines hidden behind boxes of toys.

PDEA chemists later confirmed the drums and cans contained toluene and methyl ethyl ketone, both essential chemicals in the manufacture of shabu. These chemicals, when mixed with other ingredients,

SHABU/ A20

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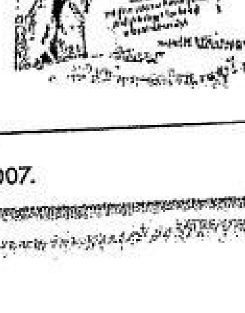

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Suspect's death inside police station probed

By Allison W. Lopez

THE MANILA POLICE DISTRICT IS investigating the death of a suspected thief who allegedly grappled with one of its members for possession of a gun inside the Sta. Cruz police station.

Arthur Gaspar was accidentally shot when the alleged snatcher tried to grab the 9 mm service firearm of PO2 Exequiel Areval of the MPD-Station 3 on Quezon Boulevard, police said.

Gaspar was declared dead on arrival at 6 p.m. at the Jose Reyes Memorial Hospital. He sustained a lone gunshot wound under the left eye.

An initial investigation by PO3 Joseph Kabigting of the MPD homicide division showed that Gaspar was brought to the police station after one Elisa Arcega complained she was robbed inside the Manila City Jail.

A body search conducted on the suspect reportedly yielded two $20 bills and four P100 bills that Arcega claimed were hers.

While Gaspar was being taken to the investigation room, he allegedly tried to get Arevalo's gun. Though two witnesses said the shooting was unintentional, Kabigting said they would still conduct an investigation.

Shabu . . .

From page A19

could produce over P700 million worth of shabu, according to Santiago. Consignee DCSB Marketing declared the chemicals as "raw materials for footware."

Optimal Media Board chair Edu Manzano said the pornographic DVDs would most likely be reproduced.

Morales said the second container, consigned to 2CT General Merchandise, contained undeclared blank DVDs and CDs.

Inventory of Pasig City ballot boxes over

By Kristine L. Alave

THE PASIG CITY ELECTION OFFICE has completed its inventory of over 1,300 ballot boxes to be used in the recount of mayoral votes.

Ma. Anne Gonzales, chief of the Commission on Elections in Pasig, said they sent on Thursday night the ballot boxes from 1,317 precincts to the Comelec warehouse on UN Avenue in Manila.

She said they tried to finish the inventory on Thursday as directed by the Comelec Second Division which ordered a revision of mayoral votes in October.

The recount was triggered by the electoral protest filed by defeated candidate Robert "Dudut" Jaworski after the May local elections.

Jaworski, who lost to former councilor Robert Eusebio by over 9,000 votes, alleged there were cases of massive electoral fraud and tampering in key areas, particularly in the city's second district.

The former congressman requested the Comelec to open and recount all votes from the second district of the city, which had 1,067 precincts. His rival contested the votes from 250 precincts in the first district.

Based on the Comelec's final tally, Eusebio garnered 116,463 votes while Jaworski got 107,141 votes.

Meanwhile, Jeff Santos, a Eusebio supporter, defended the mayor's win, adding that the second district had always been a bailiwick of the Eusebios.

METROBRIEFS

New hospital for Parañaque

THE PARAÑAQUE City government is now finalizing arrangements with the Manila International Airport Authority for a new hospital dealing with tropical diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome and avian flu. Mayor Florencio Bernabe made the announcement recently as he ordered the creation of the Parañaque Community Hospital executive committee. "This is an important step to bring international standards of health care to residents of Parañaque City, MIAA employees and international guests of our country," he said. The new hospital will be built jointly by the MIAA and the city government, conforming to international standards set by the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine. *Julie M. Aurelio*

Unlicensed beauty products

THE NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation seized several alleged unlicensed cosmetic products during simultaneous raids against an alleged salon cosmetic maker and its trading outlets in Manila and Quezon City recently. Raided was Cosmessentials Marketing Inc. at Belmonte House Building on Luzon Avenue corner Unang Hakbang Street, Quezon City. Agents of the NBI Criminal Intelligence Division also swooped down on the establishment's trading outlets, the branches of Avenue Salon.Net at Belmonte House Building on Luzon Ave. corner Unang Hakbang, Galas Quezon City; España Ave. corner Ma. Cristina St., Sampaloc, and New Panaderos St., Sta. Ana, both in Manila. Charged with violation of Section 11 (a) Republic Act 3720 as amended by Executive Order No. 175, otherwise known as Foods, Drugs, Devices and Cosmetics Act were Francilla Lee, Wivina Eulalio, Lea Resultay, Rosebella Guilang and Francis Sombilla, alleged incorporators of the raided establishments. *Tina G. Santos*

New homes for Christmas

IT'S A dream come true this Christmas for 10 families of Kapalaran Homeowners Association in Kapalaran, Barangka Drive, Mandaluyong City, as they received this week their certificates of title, giving them the chance to buy lots at a low cost and a long payment term of 25 years. Under the Community Mortgage Program of then mayor and now Rep. Neptali Gonzales II, the housing project was finally completed, with Mayor Benhur Abalos giving the awards

Random acts of kindness

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

PEOPLE BECOME VERY GENEROUS DURing Christmas, apparently influenced by the spirit of the season.

But they stop becoming generous after the Christmas season. They don't help their fellowmen in need. They forget to be charitable toward the least of their brethren.

And then they wonder why money seems to elude them despite their hard work.

They forget about karma, the law of cause and effect.

Whatever you do to your fellowmen, good or bad, comes back to you tenfold.

When you set aside part of your earnings to help the poor and needy, you will no longer face a situation when you will be in dire need of money.

Setting aside 10 percent of your monthly earnings and giving it to your church or to charity is called tithing.

Most big companies in the US, like those owned by the Rockefellers, practice tithing.

They not only set aside 10 percent of their profits, they even give more.

And the more they give, the more profits they earn. That's the way of the universe.

Next year, try tithing. The benefits you get from it will be more than what you give.

But, of course, giving must come from the heart.

* * *

But why give to others when my family needs the money more?

Charity begins at home, you will say.

But charity at home, you must know, is mandatory. You support your family because it is your moral obligation.

Helping your neighbor, however, is voluntary, an act of kindness.

And when you do a random act of kindness, the universe smiles on you.

Sooner or later, you will be rewarded.

Conversely, when you hurt your neighbor, you should expect to get hurt at some future time.

* * *

During the time of President Marcos, a judge of the defunct Court of First Instance approved the titling of Burnham Park in Baguio City to a private person.

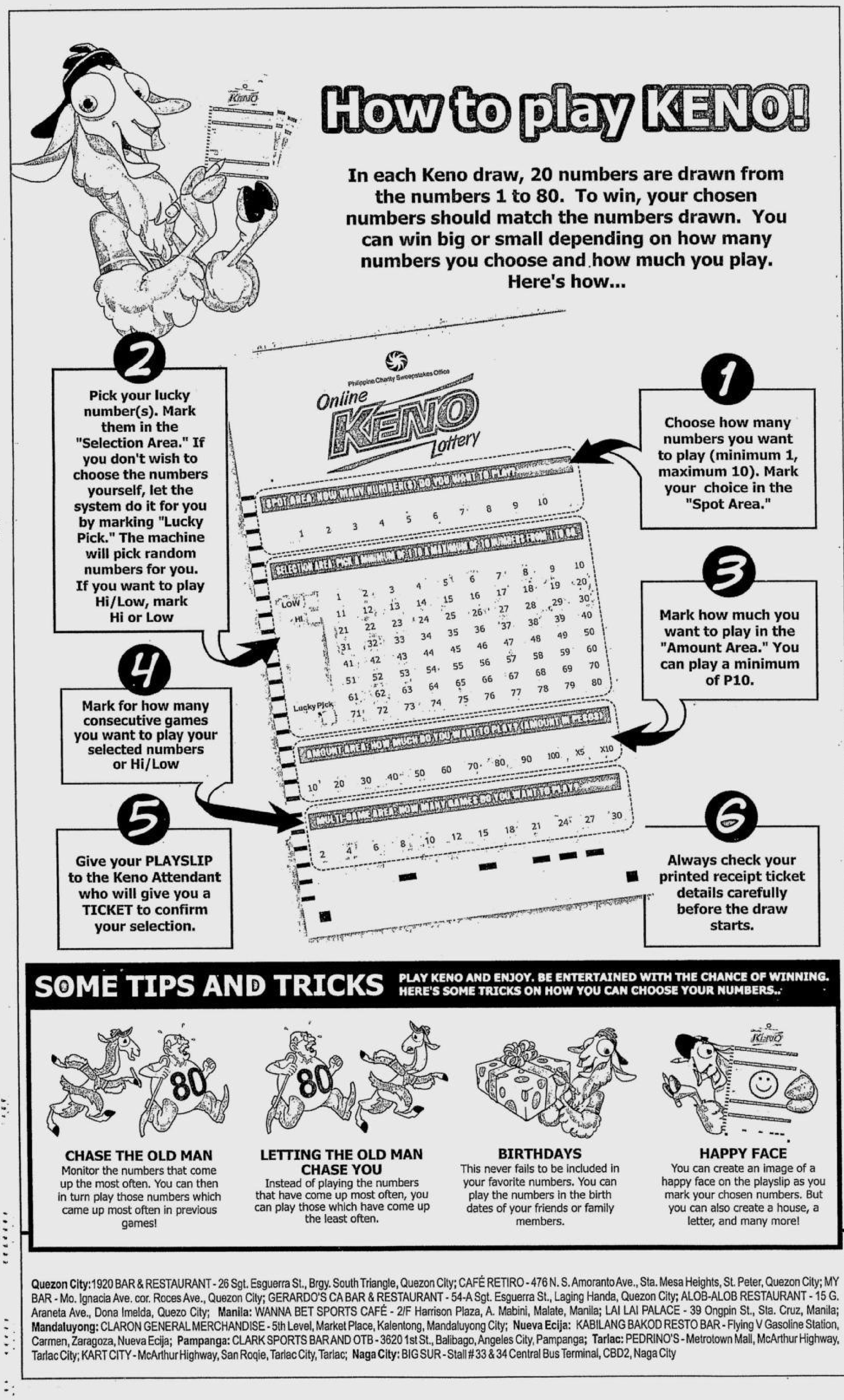
Up to now, that kind of scam is going on in Baguio City.

There is a reportedly racket in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources where ancestral lands of native tribes are auctioned off illegally.

The Court of Appeals recently nullified land auctions conducted by the DENR in Baguio, calling them scams.

An official of the Cordillera Autonomous Region, a professed close friend of a former Cabinet secretary, is reportedly selling ancestral lands of Igorot tribesmen in the City of Pines.

Secretary Lito Atienza, please look into this matter!


How to play KENO!

In each Keno draw, 20 numbers are drawn from the numbers 1 to 80. To win, your chosen numbers should match the numbers drawn. You can win big or small depending on how many numbers you choose and how much you play. Here's how...

1 Choose how many numbers you want to play (minimum 1, maximum 10). Mark your choice in the "Spot Area."

2 Pick your lucky number(s). Mark them in the "Selection Area." If you don't wish to choose the numbers yourself, let the system do it for you by marking "Lucky Pick." The machine will pick random numbers for you. If you want to play Hi/Low, mark Hi or Low

3 Mark how much you want to play in the "Amount Area." You can play a minimum of P10.

4 Mark for how many consecutive games you want to play your selected numbers or Hi/Low

5 Give your PLAYSLIP to the Keno Attendant who will give you a TICKET to confirm your selection.

6 Always check your printed receipt ticket details carefully before the draw starts.

SOME TIPS AND TRICKS
PLAY KENO AND ENJOY. BE ENTERTAINED WITH THE CHANCE OF WINNING. HERE'S SOME TRICKS ON HOW YOU CAN CHOOSE YOUR NUMBERS..

CHASE THE OLD MAN
Monitor the numbers that come up the most often. You can then in turn play those numbers which came up most often in previous games!

LETTING THE OLD MAN CHASE YOU
Instead of playing the numbers that have come up most often, you can play those which have come up the least often.

BIRTHDAYS
This never fails to be included in your favorite numbers. You can play the numbers in the birth dates of your friends or family members.

HAPPY FACE
You can create an image of a happy face on the playslip as you mark your chosen numbers. But you can also create a house, a letter, and many more!

Quezon City: 1920 BAR & RESTAURANT - 26 Sgt. Esguerra St., Brgy. South Triangle, Quezon City; CAFÉ RETIRO - 476 N. S. Amoranto Ave., Sta. Mesa Heights, St. Peter, Quezon City; MY BAR - Mo. Ignacia Ave. cor. Roces Ave., Quezon City; GERARDO'S CA BAR & RESTAURANT - 54-A Sgt. Esguerra St., Laging Handa, Quezon City; ALOB-ALOB RESTAURANT - 15 G. Araneta Ave., Dona Imelda, Quezo City; **Manila:** WANNA BET SPORTS CAFÉ - 2/F Harrison Plaza, A. Mabini, Malate, Manila; LAI LAI PALACE - 39 Ongpin St., Sta. Cruz, Manila; **Mandaluyong:** CLARON GENERAL MERCHANDISE - 5th Level, Market Place, Kalentong, Mandaluyong City; **Nueva Ecija:** KABILANG BAKOD RESTO BAR - Flying V Gasoline Station, Carmen, Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija; **Pampanga:** CLARK SPORTS BAR AND OTB - 3620 1st St., Balibago, Angeles City, Pampanga; **Tarlac:** PEDRINO'S - Metrotown Mall, McArthur Highway, Tarlac City; KART CITY - McArthur Highway, San Roqie, Tarlac City, Tarlac; **Naga City:** BIG SUR - Stall #33 & 34 Central Bus Terminal, CBD2, Naga City

N. Korea resists Dec. 31 deadline

WASHINGTON—THE UNITED States is still struggling to get North Korea to disclose its nuclear programs, a challenge in a society so tight-lipped that it would keep even clothing sizes secret, a US official said on Thursday.

North Korea has promised to make a declaration by Dec. 31 as part of a wider deal to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons in exchange for economic and diplomatic benefits from the United States and others.

The senior official told Reuters that reflexively secretive North Korea was reluctant to detail its nuclear proliferation activities—which it has steadfastly denied—as well as what it regards as military secrets in its declaration.

"They have real weapons and so they should tell us what the weapons program looks like," said the official, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the negotiations.

"That is where you get into military secrets and, in a country that would keep a sweater size secret, you can imagine the difficulty in revealing military secrets," he added.

North Korea has published no economic statistics in the past several decades and severely limits its citizens' travel and contact with the outside world. Its leader, Kim Jong-il, has uttered only several words in public in his long career.

Sung Kim, a US State Department official who is in Pyongyang to discuss North Korea's nuclear declaration, has reported progress in some areas but sticking points in others, the official said. *Reuters*

Ex-East bloc countries lift border barriers

VALKA, LATVIA—FLARES AND cheers greeted the start of the expansion of the European Union's border-free zone to nine mostly eastern European countries on Friday, though some worry about a rise in crime or illegal immigration.

The expansion of the EU's so-called Schengen zone, where people can travel without showing passports, saw border barriers go down first in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia at midnight.

Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Malta were to follow an hour later in what many see as the final lifting of the Iron Curtain.

"It feels good, we have always felt that this was more like one town," said Iluta Melke, an office worker in this small Latvian town, formerly split by a border post running across the street from its sister Valga in Estonia.

After a countdown to midnight by a recording of a giant gong, border guards fired off a red and green flare before lifting the border boom to allow hundreds of people to walk freely through.

Further south, a ribbon was to be symbolically cut at a border crossing between Lithuania and Latvia.

The move is expected to boost business and tourism, allowing people to travel 4,000 km from Estonia to Portugal without showing a passport.

Some in western Europe fear increased crime or that the EU's new external borders with countries like Ukraine, Belarus and Russia will be less secure against illegal immigration.

In Austria, the village of Deutschkreutz, close to the Hungarian border, has hired a private security firm to patrol its streets. Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer acknowledged worries existed, but dismissed them.

"What is Schengen? It is not criminality, it is not uncertainty, it is not fear, it is a big space of security and stability," he said after symbolically sawing through a border pole with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico on Thursday.

Outside the EU, some in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia fear a "fortress Europe" where travel will be more difficult, though European officials say this will not be the case.

"For bona fide travellers, travels ... will be faster and easier," the EU Commission said in a statement, noting people will only need one Schengen visa not separate national visas.

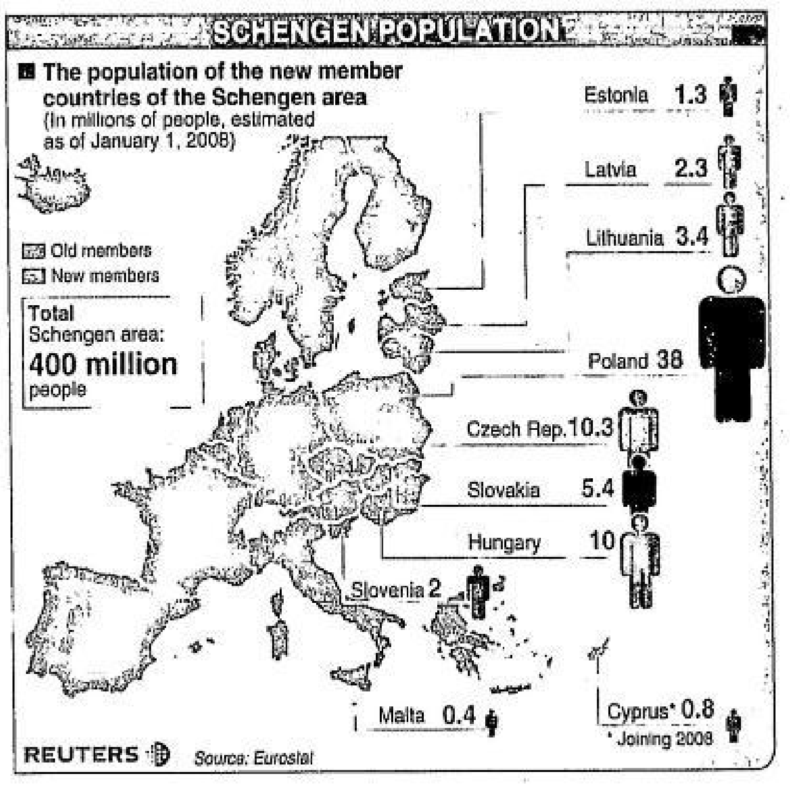
The expansion of the Schengen zone, named after a Luxembourg village where a first agreement on passport-free travel was struck in 1985, will mean it covers 24 countries.

It will include an area about a third the size of the United States and be home to 400 million people. It first covers land and sea borders and will be extended to airports next March.

Though some border towns were planning celebrations, the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 has meant travel across borders has already become much simpler.

Thousands of people from countries like Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have emigrated to work in Britain and Ireland, which opened their markets to workers from the new EU countries, even though Britain and Ireland have remained outside Schengen. *Reuters*

SCHENGEN POPULATION


The population of the new member countries of the Schengen area
(In millions of people, estimated as of January 1, 2008)
Old members
New members
Total Schengen area: 400 million people
Estonia 1.3
Latvia 2.3
Lithuania 3.4
Poland 38
Czech Rep. 10.3
Slovakia 5.4
Hungary 10
Slovenia 2
Malta 0.4
Cyprus* 0.8
* Joining 2008

REUTERS Source: Eurostat

US Congress approves tighter gun control law

WASHINGTON—THE US Congress has approved the first major gun control legislation in more than a decade, broadening background checks for gun buyers in the wake of a deadly campus shooting earlier this year by a mentally ill student.

The legislation approved Wednesday by the Senate provides government funds to improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), the main way gun purchases are monitored in America.

It also allocates funds for gun owners and potential gun owners who are prevented from owning weapons due to mental illness so that they may challenge the ruling in court.

Existing laws prevent mentally ill people and convicted felons from legally owning firearms, but many states lack the funds to keep their information up to date and report it to the NICS.

The measure, the first gun legislation approved since 1994, passed by voice vote in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

"A credible ... federal database to provide accurate background checks benefits everyone," said Senator Patrick Leahy, one of the co-sponsors of a bill that arose following the deadliest campus shooting in US history.

Improving the background check system and culling erroneous records "will help curb the number of firearms that get into the hands of troubled individuals," Leahy said.

In April, a mentally deranged gunman shot and killed 31 people and then himself at Virginia Tech university in the United States, sparking widespread calls for tighter gun control laws.

The shooter, South Korea-born Seung Hui-Cho, 23, an English major, bought two handguns even after police and professors recognized that he was mentally disturbed.

The campus shooting "made it clear" that the background check system for potential gun buyers "needs to have better information, better technology, and clearer standards," said Representative John Dingell, a Democrat who coauthored the bill that passed the House in June. *AFP*

Scientists say asteroid may hit Mars in late January

LOS ANGELES—MARS COULD be in for an asteroid hit.

A newly discovered hunk of space rock has a 1 in 75 chance of slamming into the Red Planet on Jan. 30, scientists said Thursday.

"These odds are extremely unusual. We frequently work with really long odds when we track ... threatening asteroids," said Steve Chesley, an astronomer with the Near Earth Object Program at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

The asteroid, known as 2007 WD5, was discovered in late November and is similar in size to the Tunguska object that hit remote central Siberia in 1908, unleashing energy equivalent to a 15-megaton nuclear bomb that wiped out 60 million trees.

Scientists tracking the asteroid, which is halfway to Mars, initially put the odds of impact at 1 in 350 and increased the chances this week after analyzing the data. Scientists expect the odds to diminish again early next month after getting new observations of the asteroid's orbit, Chesley said.

"We know that it's going to fly by Mars and most likely going to miss, but there's a possibility of an impact," he said.

If the asteroid does smash into Mars, it'll likely aim near the equator close to where the rover Opportunity has been exploring the Martian plains since 2004. The robot is not in danger because it lies outside the impact zone. Speeding at 12.8 km a second, a collision would carve a hole the size of the famed Meteor Crater in Arizona. *AP*

WORLDBRIEFS

Insurgent 'torture chamber' found in Iraq

BAGHDAD—A blood-spattered "torture complex" used by Iraqi insurgents, and the remains of 26 people buried nearby, were found in the province of Diyala on Thursday, the US military announced. *AFP*

Aftershocks jolt New Zealand

WELLINGTON—Aftershocks continued to rattle the eastern New Zealand city of Gisborne Friday as residents started counting the cost of a powerful 6.8 earthquake which smashed buildings in the commercial center. No major injuries were reported after Thursday night's quake, which was felt throughout much of New Zealand, although many people had been Christmas shopping in the city area when it struck. But Television New Zealand reported that an elderly woman died of a heart attack just after the quake struck. *AFP*

US Congress slaps restrictions on Pakistan aid

WASHINGTON—Congress has slapped restrictions on US military aid to Pakistan, creating a rift with the George W. Bush administration on how aggressively to pursue democratic reform there, congressional observers said. The new restrictions, part of the 1,400-page "omnibus" spending bill approved by Congress this week, put limits on $300 million of US military aid received each year by Pakistan, a key US ally in the "war on terror." In the past, Pakistan enjoyed free rein to use the funds. *AFP*

Man cleared of N. Ireland's worst atrocity

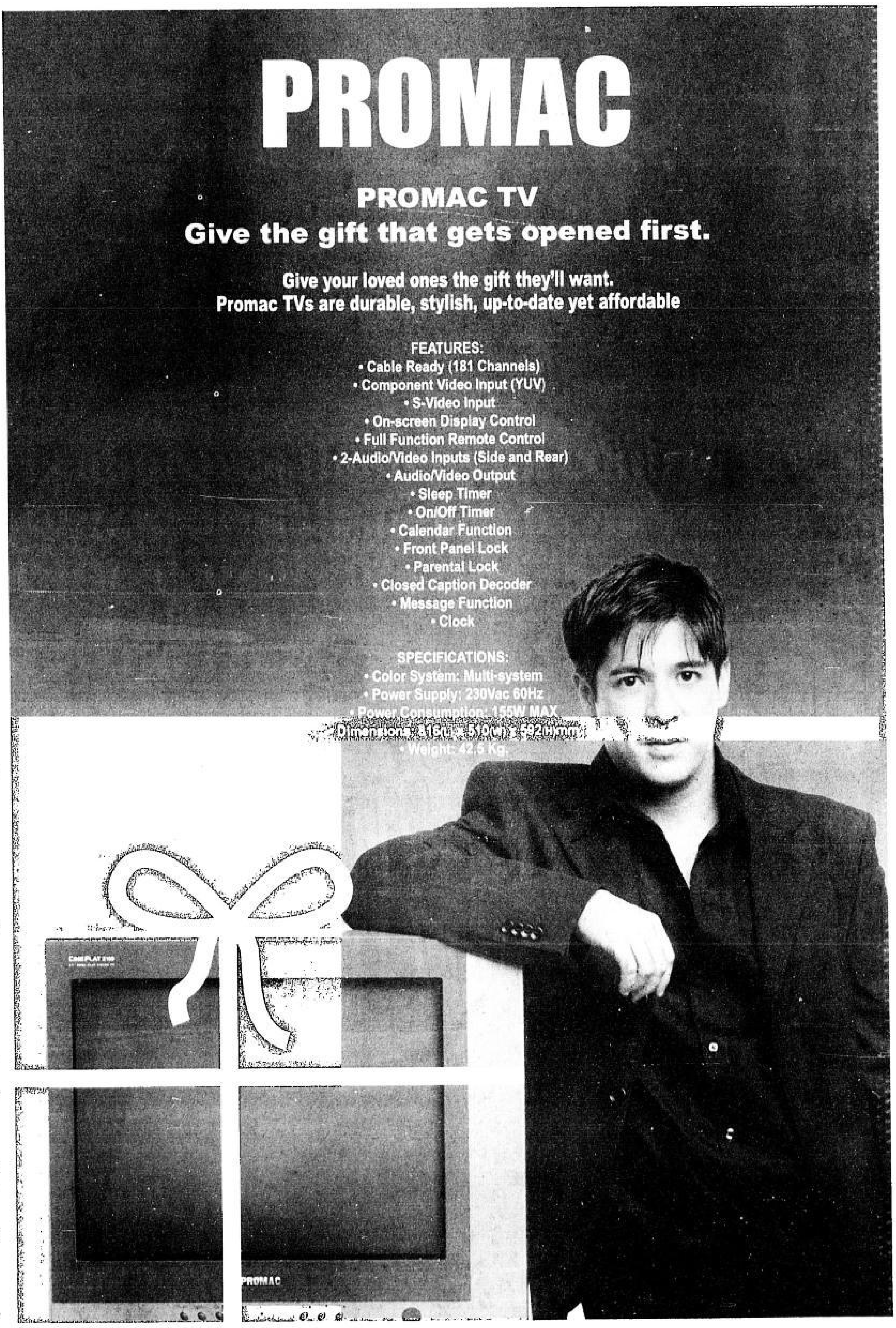
BELFAST—A court on Thursday cleared a man accused of murdering 29 people in the Omagh bombing, Northern Ireland's worst atrocity in three decades of violence. Sean Hoey, 38, had denied a total of 56 charges relating to a huge car bomb that ripped through the busy high street of the market town of Omagh, west of Belfast, on Aug. 15, 1998. Supporters of Hoey applauded in the court when the long-awaited verdict was announced, witnesses said, while stunned relatives of the victims were highly critical of the police investigation. *AFP*

Spain seeks extradition of ex-Guantanamo men

LONDON—Spain sought the extradition of two Arab men for alleged al-Qaida links on Thursday, a day after the United States freed them without charge from Guantanamo Bay and let them fly to Britain. British police said they had served European Union arrest warrants on Jordanian Jamil el-Banna and Libyan Omar Deghayes, both British residents who are wanted in Spain on terrorism-related charges. *Reuters*

Israeli forces kill 7 Gaza gunmen

GAZA—Israeli tanks and troops backed by helicopter gunships raided the central Gaza Strip on Thursday, killing at least seven Palestinian gunmen, militant sources and hospital officials said. *Reuters*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• On/Off Timer
• Calendar Function
• Front Panel Lock
• Parental Lock
• Closed Caption Decoder
• Message Function
• Clock
SPECIFICATIONS:
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• Power Supply: 230Vac 60Hz
• Power Consumption: 155W MAX
• Dimensions: 816(L) x 510(W) x 592(H)mm
• Weight: 42.5 Kg.

PLDT Touch Card Special Edition Launched

From left, PLDT's Retail Business Head Dan Ibarra, SVP Customer Sales and Marketing Eric Alberto and FVP and Head of Corporate Business Solutions Nerissa Ramos celebrate the launch with PLDT's newest endorser Marian Rivera.

Heads turned and voices hushed upon the arrival of Marian Rivera, TV's primetime princess from the hit teleserye MariMar at the jam-packed media launch of PLDT Touch Card Special Edition held recently. The successful launch presented Rivera as PLDT's newest endorser for Touch Card Special Edition, a new promotional call card available absolutely free in sari-sari stores nationwide.

Mr. Eric Alberto, Senior Vice President, PLDT Customer Sales and Marketing acknowledged Rivera's participation in the ad campaign. "We see Marian as the perfect face for PLDT Touch Card Special Edition. With her help, we hope to bring the power and convenience of PLDT Touch Card to just as many people around the country."

Mr. Dan Ibarra, PLDT Retail Business Head initiated the ceremonial unveiling of the PLDT Touch Card Special Edition. "The PLDT Touch Card Special Edition powered by PLDT Load is a conscious effort by PLDT to make telecommunications more convenient and affordable for Filipinos. It is handy, easy to use, and is now reloadable so it goes a long way. We hope everybody will take advantage of its benefits."

PLDT Touch Card Special Edition featuring Rivera is an innovative addition to the PLDT Cards roster, offering affordable NDD rates at P3 per minute and IDD rates for as low as P8 per minute. It is also reloadable, allowing users to top up remaining call credits or reuse their existing card through PLDT Load, available in over 1,000,000 SmartLoad retailers nationwide.

Users can load as low as P30 valid for seven days. Other available PLDT Load denominations include P60, P115, P200, P300, P500 and P1,000. In addition, PLDT introduces the new P100 and P175 denominations, both valid for 30 days. Every P100 reload automatically earns users extra P10 load from today until January 31, 2008.

The PLDT Load promo also applies to the reloadable PLDT Budget Card Middle East Edition and PLDT Vibe Internet card. For more information about PLDT products and services, call 171 or 10120 for the PLDT Cards Customer Service Hotline, log on to www.mypad.net or visit your nearest PLDT Business Office or SMART Wireless Center.

Editor Luverne B. Gueco

The WORLD

Pakistan mosque bombing kills 50

CHARSADDA—AT LEAST 50 PEOPLE were killed on Friday in a suicide bombing at a mosque in northwest Pakistan targeting a former interior minister and close ally of President Pervez Musharraf.

The bomber blew himself up in a crowded mosque at the residential compound of Aftab Sherpao, an outspoken opponent of Islamic militancy who until last month was the top civilian antiterrorism official.

Sherpao was reportedly unhurt in the attack, which hit as the mosque was crowded with Muslim faithful celebrating the first day of the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha.

The carnage raised the specter of a bloody run-up to controversial national elections on Jan. 8, with Musharraf—a pivotal figure in the US-led "war on terror"—battling to contain Taliban and al-Qaida-linked militants.

"At least 50 people have been killed and dozens were injured in the attack," district police chief Feroz Shah told AFP. "I fear the death toll may rise further." Provincial health minister Syed Kamal Shah said more than 100 people were injured.

The wounded were being shifted to hospitals in Charshadda, the town where the attack occurred, and the nearby provincial capital Peshawar.

It was the deadliest attack in Pakistan since October, when twin suicide bombings killed 139 people at a parade in honor of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto.

Friday's powerful blast ripped the limbs off worshippers and spattered the mosque with blood and pieces of flesh. Doors and windows of the mosque were smashed by the impact.

"I lost my two brothers," said Jehangir Khan, fighting back tears as wails of mourning and the sounds of sirens reverberated across the site. He said he had helped retrieve six bodies of children.

Another witness, Jangrez Khan, said the bomber detonated as the prayer leader said "Allahu Akbar," or God is Greatest. *AFP*

Has she been good enough to get something for Christmas?
CHILDHOPE asia PHILIPPINES
To help our 300,000 street children, call 563-4647
I've finished all my meals

Bush won't discuss CIA videotapes

WASHINGTON—US PRESIDENT GEORGE W. Bush insisted on Thursday he did not learn until recently that the CIA destroyed videotapes of harsh interrogations, and said he would not speak any more in public about the issue currently under investigation by the administration and Congress.

At a White House news conference, Bush expressed confidence in congressional investigations, which his Justice Department had balked at last week, saying he thought all the various inquiries underway would eventually get to the truth.

"Until these inquiries are complete, until the oversights' finished, I will be rendering no opinion from the podium," Bush said. Defending his administration's aggressive pursuit of terrorism suspects, the president said his critics were ignoring reality.

The congressional investigation moved into a new phase as the House of Representatives Intelligence committee began reviewing CIA documents it had requested and issued a subpoena for the former head of the CIA's clandestine branch, Jose Rodriguez, who is reported to have ordered the tapes' destruction.

"We have been told that Mr. Rodriguez would like to tell his story but his counsel has advised us that a subpoena would be necessary. We therefore have issued the subpoena for Mr. Rodriguez," said committee chair Silvestre Reyes, a Texas Democrat.

Reyes also said the panel was in talks with CIA officials regarding its request for testimony on Jan. 16 from John Rizzo, the agency's top lawyer. *Reuters*

Queen Elizabeth II becomes Britain's oldest monarch

QUEEN Elizabeth II AP

LONDON—QUEEN Elizabeth II was set to become Britain's oldest monarch Thursday, overtaking her great-great grandmother Queen Victoria, although in discreet royal fashion no events were planned to mark the record.

"This is just another normal working day for the queen," a royal spokesperson told AFP, adding that the 81-year-old was spending the day in Buckingham Palace dealing with routine paperwork and some Christmas correspondence.

"There's nothing the queen is doing to mark the occasion," she added.

Victoria died in 1901 aged 81 years and 243 days. Elizabeth was to pass Victoria's record at around 5 p.m. Thursday—taking into account times of birth and death, according to Buckingham Palace.

She is the world's second-longest serving monarch alive, after Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej. She has outlasted 11 prime ministers—the first was Sir Winston Churchill—and is the first to have a prime minister, Tony Blair, born during her reign.

Victoria will retain the record for longest-serving monarch ever for some time, though: she ruled Britain and its empire for nearly 64 years. Elizabeth will surpass if that she is still on the throne on Sept. 9, 2015. *AFP*

SPORTS

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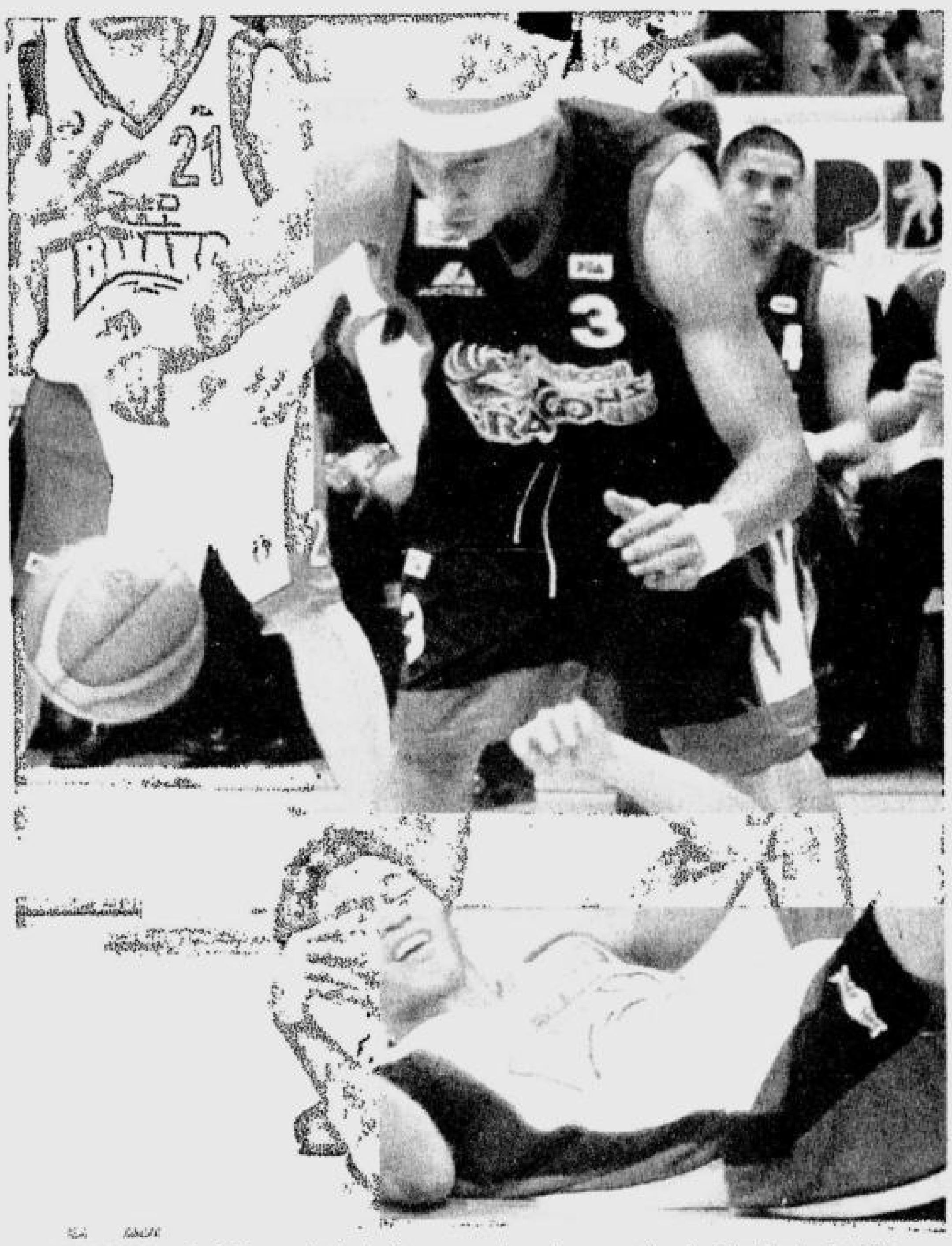

RED BULL'S Junthy Valenzuela (below) manages to get a pass off as he hits the deck while Welcoat's Nic Belasco tries to wrest possession. RYAN LIM

Red Bull whips Welcoat, keeps grip on No. 2

Tigers roll to 5th straight win; Magnolia tests Alaska in CdO

GAME TODAY (*Xavier University Gym, Cagayan de Oro*)
4:30 p.m.—Alaska vs Magnolia

By Musong R. Castillo

RED BULL SEIZED CONTROL EARLY ON and never let the reins of the game slip from its hands as it whipped undermanned Welcoat, 106-97, to take a firmer grip of solo second spot in the PBA Smart Philippine Cup eliminations at the Cuneta Astrodome in Pasay.

Pocket-sized Topex Robinson and Cyrus Baguio scored 15 points each to share team honors for the Barako, who zoomed to early double-digit leads before improving to 9-5 (win-loss) overall.

They are now a full game up on idle squads Sta. Lucia, Talk 'N Text and Alaska going into the final two weeks of the elimination round.

"But I think the biggest game for us is the Alaska game (on Christmas)," coach Yeng Guiao later said. "It's important because a win there would most likely set us apart for second place."

Tournament format calls for the top two teams after this round to march on automatically into the semifinals.

Only one team will get the boot and Welcoat seems to be in danger of suffering the same fate it did in its first two tournaments in the league. The Dragons, after a respectable start to their second year, have now lost eight straight games to fall to 3-12 overall.

Tigers roar

Coca-Cola, the closest team that Welcoat hopes to catch, made the Dragons life even tougher, rising to 6-8 later in the night after Ronjay Buenafe completed a three-point play with 9.1 seconds left to lift the Tigers to an 84-82 decision against defending champion Barangay Ginebra.

It was the fifth straight win for the rampaging Tigers, while the loss was the ninth in 15 outings for the struggling Gin Kings.

Guiao did not hide how important the game against Alaska on Tuesday is as he gave Baguio heavy minutes to find his groove this early despite the fact that he was still not in 100-percent shape last night. Baguio just came off a bout with chicken pox and hardly practiced the last week.

With a flourish

But Baguio did not show signs of rust, finishing some of Red Bull's fastbreaks with the same flourish as before.

The former Santo Tomas wingman dumped all his points in the last three quarters, highlighted by nine in the third which Red Bull closed out with an 84-69 lead.

Red Bull took a 42-23 lead past the halfway point of the second period and then played in cruise control the rest of the way as the Dragons, without Jay-R Reyes, Ryan Araña and Froilan Baguion, struggled to find the means to patch up the holes in their roster.

Reyes missed his fourth straight game because of a bruised left knee, Araña served out a one-game suspension for physical play, while Baguion was out for the sixth consecutive outing because of an eye injury.

Meanwhile, Magnolia tries to snap a three-game slide today when the Beverage Masters collide with Alaska in a road game at the Xavier University gym in Cagayan de Oro.

The scores:

First Game

RED BULL 106—Robinson 15, Baguio 15, Valenzuela 13, Duncil 10, Hrabak 10, Sharma 9, Cruz 9, andaya 7, Najorda 7, Pennisi 6, Bugia 5, Membrere 0.

WELCOAT 97—Devance 23, Belasco 16, Wainwright 14, Mente 11, Dulay 10, Lopez 5, Sta. Maria 5, Tangkay 5, Gellg 4, Ballesteros 2, Ibanez 2.

Quarters: 27-17, 53-43, 84-69, 106-97

Second Game

COCA-COLA 84—Cabagnot 17, Buenafe 13, Taulava 10, Dimaunahan 9, Enrile 7, Arigo 7, Calimag 6, Telan 6, Catli 5, Islp 4, Tolomia 0, Duremdes 0.

BARANGAY GINEBRA 82—Salvacion 19, Helterbrand 16, Tubid 12, Menk 12, Macapagal 6, Artadi 6, Reavis 5, Mamaril 4, Aquino 2, Escalona 0.

Quarters: 20-24, 37-40, 61-63, 84-82

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ANNIE Albania lands the knockout punch that handed Filipino boxers their lone gold medal in the recent Southeast Asian Games. An emotional Albania (right) during the awarding ceremony. RAFFY LERMA

Abap filing protest before 2007 ends

By June Navarro

BRANDING ITS HIDEOUS EXperience in the 24th Southeast Asian Games as demeaning and an act of ill repute, the Amateur Boxing Association of the Philippines has vowed to lodge a formal protest to the International Boxing Association.

Boxing chief Manny Lopez yesterday said the complaint would be sent to newly elected Aiba president Ching Kuo Wu of Taiwan before the end of the year to address the alleged cheating that spoiled the boxing competitions of the recent Games held in Thailand.

Lopez said pieces of evidence would be presented to back up the Abap's claim of rampant cheating that allowed the Thai boxers to sweep all but one of the 17 gold medals at stake in the sport.

"We're in the process of gathering available evidence to prove that there was cheating," said Lopez during the Scoop weekly session sponsored by Accel at the Kamayan-Padre Faura restaurant.

With the hosts carting away a total of 16 golds, the Filipino pugilists only managed to steal one gold courtesy of flyweight Annie Albania, who floored her Thai counterpart in the final.

"We already talked with Mr. Ching and he assured us that the Philippines will not be sanctioned for what we have done," said Lopez, who pulled out seven Filipino boxers ranged against the Thais in the finals.

"And besides, the records will bear us out that the decisions on the last seven fights were all retirement. It means that we fought but eventually retired," he added.

LOPEZ FIDEL PEREN

Lopez, who functions as the secretary-general of the Aiba, also frowned on reports that it was Thailand's retaliation to the alleged cheating that transpired during the Manila games two years ago.

"If we cheated, how come they (Thais) won six gold medals in boxing," said Lopez.

But despite the dissension, Lopez said the boxing team would continue on its Olympic quest when another Olympic qualifying takes place in Bangkok on Jan. 27.

"It (protest) will not deter us in our quest to get those Olympic slots for the Beijing Olympics next year," said Lopez, who will be sending five boxers to the Thailand qualifier.

"We are definitely going to Thailand for the second qualifying tournament of the Olympics. We will not waiver in our resolve to institute reforms to this remnants of corrupt practices that have been happening in the amateur boxing circle," he added.

Lopez explained that what occurred in Thailand should not be perceived as a form of boycott but a protest against the rampant unfair decisions not only against the Filipinos but also from other countries who lost in their campaign.

Lopez said the protest was decided by a collegial body made up of Philippine Olympic Committee president Jose "Peping" Cojuangco Jr., POC secretary-general Steve Hontiveros, chief of mission Monico Puentevella and deputy chief of mission Richie Garcia.

Sadorra settles for fourth in Singapore Masters tilt

Final Standings:

7.0 points—GM Zurab Azmaiparashvili (GEO), GM Zhang Zhong (SIN); 6.5 points—GM Sandipan Chanda (IND); 6.0 points—**IM Julio Catalino Sadorra (RP)**, GM Dao Thien Hai (VIE), IM RR Laxman (IND), GM Susanto Megaranto (INA), IM Girinath PDS (IND), GM Wu Shaobin (SIN); 5.5 points—**IM Oliver Dimakiling (RP)**, GM Nguyen Anh Dung (VIE), **GM Mark Paragua (RP)**, Lin Chen (CHN); 5.0 points—**IM Enrique Paciencia (RP)**, Wan Yunguo (CHN), WGM Gu Xiaobing (CHN), **IM Jayson Gonzales (RP)**, IM Salor Sitanggang (INA), WIM Irine Kharisma Sukandar (INA)

FILIPINO INTERNATIONAL MASter Julio Catalino Sadorra split the point with Chinese Grandmaster Wu Shaobin in the ninth and final round yesterday to finish fourth in the Singapore Masters International Open Tournament.

The Singapore-based Sadorra tallied 6.0 points, a full point behind champion GM Zurab Azmaiparashvili of Georgia and runner-up GM Zhang Zhong of Singapore and half a point off third placer GM Sandipan Chanda of India.

Sadorra actually wound up tied with Vietnamese GM Dao Thien Hai, Indonesian GM Susanto Megaranto and Indian IMs RR Laxman and Girinath PDS, but emerged with the highest tie break points.

The 21-year-old Sadorra emerged as the best Filipino finisher in the 42-man field, towing along 5.5 pointers GM Mark Paragua and IM Oliver Dimakiling and 5.0 pointers IM Emrique Paciencia and IM Jayson Gonzales.

He also had a 2523 performance rating, better than his current Elo of 2414, after facing GMs in the last four rounds.

Sadorra drew with Azmaiparashvili (Elo 2606) in the sixth, bowed to top seed Zhang (2634) of Singapore in the seventh and drew with GM Susanto Megaranto (2569) of Indonesia in the eighth.

Sharing 10th to 13th places with Paragua and Dimakiling were GM Nguyen Anh Dung of Vietnam and Lin Chen of China.

National Master Rolando Andador finished with 4.0 points.

Marlon Bernardino, Contributor

SADORRA: Best Filipino finisher.

Why mope, we won the basketball gold, didn't we?

By Percy D. Della

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA—YOU don't have to read through all the names of our medal winners in the Southeast Asian Games to know where the most precious metal really glitters.

Just zip to the entry on men's basketball.

Hey, we took the gold in our favorite sport, didn't we?

So what's all the moping about our sixth place finish in the 24th SEA Games?

To the legions among us with a discombobulated view of sports, the basketball medal was all that mattered in King Bhumibol's realm anyway.

Swimmer Miguel Molina's three-gold individual feat?

It is not worth a splash.

World No. 12 Amaya Paz's two golds in archery?

Forget it.

Cecil Mamiit's comeback singles triumph in men's tennis?

No big deal.

The 21-medal haul by the tracksters, the swimmers' 18, the fencers' 15 and cyclists' 10?

Uninspiring.

So what's all the moping about our sixth place finish?

We won in basketball remember?

Let's see how the Harbour Centre-RP players achieved that triumph with aplomb.

They waltzed past Cambodia, 136-82.

Boogied over Indonesia, 75-49.

Ran circles around Malaysia, 108-60.

Toyed with host Thailand, 94-53 for the crown.

Yehey!

COMMENTARY

So arduous was the road to the gold our players had to go the extra mile.

They actually played without tying one hand behind the back.

They actually waited after the laugher against the hosts to unfurl and wave the Philippine standard.

Our pedaling, kicking, chopping, heaving, running, stroking near misses for the gold signified by 91 silver medals—the most in Nakhon Ratchasima?

These pale to the pulse-pounding excitement of the clinching cage game.

Hey, didn't POC president Peping Cojuangco say it was A-okay to lose in the other games, but not on the hard court?

So why are we smarting from our sixth place finish?

We won in basketball didn't we?

* * *

Frankie Miñoza on the NBC, CBS or ABC television networks?

It is gladdening to know that the 48-old Miñoza is extending his gaze beyond the Asian circuit.

The country's most successful golfer is setting his sights on the lucrative American golf scene.

The PGA Seniors Tour to be exact—when he becomes eligible two years from now.

Frankie will have to bring his game to the next level to qualify.

But with the Pinoy's natural flair on the fairways, I am sure he'd be able to hack it when the time comes.

His entry into the American scene will add to the fervor of Pinoy couch potatoes.

Why these Joe Sixpacks, et al have been waiting for another *kababayan* to emerge on national TV during the lazy summer weekends.

The women on tour—Jennifer Rosales and Dorothy Delasin sad to say—have faded from the game.

At a time when foreign players, mostly South Koreans, dominate the LPGA circuit.

Not that they have become paupers for playing lousy in 2007. Jenny and Dorothy have won at least 120 million pesos each since their rookie year on Tour in 2000.

But the mere fact that they were not around, so to speak the past season has saddened the couch potatoes.

Not even the Philippine Sportswriters Association is so inclined to invite them for its annual awards night this year.

Sports note: The generosity of townmates abroad has helped four deserving kids in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija graduate from college. Many more will attain that goal if the Cuyapo USA Association's scholarship coffers are replenished. People wishing to contribute are urged to contact president Romeo Nido at omet@cuyapousa.com

NCA World Championship features top cockers

THE COUNTRY'S TOP GAMEFOWL AFICIONAdos, including boxing superstar Manny Pacquiao and prominent politicians, will cross paths on Jan. 8, 10 and 12 when the National Cocker's Association (NCA) World Championship Derby is held at the Rizal Multipurpose building in Pasig City.

Local Government Sec. Ronnie Puno will defend his title in the international derby, which would include foreign breeders. Among Puno's prizes last year was a trophy handcrafted by national artist Ed Castrillo.

Expected to crowd Puno for the title are Negros Occidental Rep. Iggy Arroyo, last year's runner-up, and former Rizal Gov. Ito Yñares, himself engaged in massive breeding for several years now.

Other strong candidates to unseat Puno are Eddie Araneta, a veteran in the cockfigthing world; Patrick Antonio, Benjie Lim and Manny Pacquiao, runners-up in the recently concluded NCA Stag derby Mario Villamor and NCA chair Rudy Albano.

Top American gamefowl breeders are also arriving in January for the World Championship Derby.

Former world champion Jerry Glass heads the foreign cast which also has Dan Gray, Joseph Wolcott, Larry Whitehead, Eddie Odell, Ray Alexander and other prominent breeders.

SPORTSWATCH

P1 Million Poker tourney at Airport Casino today

POKER TOUR'S ROYAL RUMBLE STARTS today at the Airport Casino in Parañaque City with the first of two P1 million prizes tournaments.

The event is a preliminary to the Philippine Poker Tour's Dec. 28 P1 million prize for the No Limit Texas Hold 'em poker tournament at Players Den on 1786 Mabini St., Malate, Manila.

Alaso slated are tomorrow's P500,000 poker tournament in Casino Filipino Cebu City and another P500,000 tournament in Angeles City on Dec. 29.

Philippine Poker Tour, which runs the Players' Den, said it will close the year with a big bang as the brightest amateur players will fight with the professionals to crown this year's poker king.

Several new faces, Filipinos and foreigners alike, are competing. Today's tournament entry fee for P1 million prize is P2,000 with a buy-in of P20,000. The tournament has no re-buy but allows one add-on.

MCC non-master begins

THE MCC WEEKLY NON-MASTER STANdard chess tourney begins at 10:30 am today along with the 16-under standard event at the upper 2F of St. Francis Square in Mandaluyong City.

The event is open to all untitled players-unrated and rated regardless of ages and sexes. The 16-under event is limited to boys and girls who must be born on 1991 onwards. Both are two-day competitions and will apply the six rounds Swiss with time control of 90 minutes per player.

Interested parties can register at least 30 minutes before the tournament starts. For details, call MCC at 8268560 and 0916-8521069.

SJC 4- cock derby up

METRO MANILA'S LEADING COCKERS brace for another tough challenge today in San Juan Coliseum's Super Angels 4-cock derby featuring more than 100 fights.

The cockfest comes on the heels of "Pamaskong Rambulan 6-cock derby" last Wednesday, won by four entries: Whang Zhi Zhi of Louie Cua, Monte I of Boy Chayong, AS Golden Compass of Allan Siaco and JSF Jof of Joel Fernando.

Hosted by Minda Gater Amoyo, the event, offers P300,000 in prize plus a brand new motorcycle for the fastest win champ.

Meanwhile, the 750 K Fastest Win One-Cock *Ulutan* follows next on Dec. 28 with P750,000 at stake.

Pamaskong Salpukan today

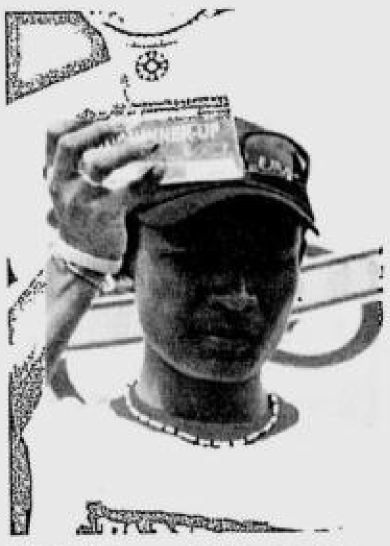
THE LAST BATCH OF PARTICIPANTS WILL see action in the 320-entry *Pamaskong Salpukan* 6-cock derby today at Makati Coliseum.

The two-cock elimination round will feature tough entries by Rey Briones, Efren Canlas, Frank Cabaddu, Richard Bates, Eric dela Rosa, Super Pacman group, Lito Roque, Jun Manguera, John Capinpin, Alan Tan, Madlambayan Brothers, Pete Ison, Louie Cua, J. Diokno, Col. Necy Katigbak. William Go and Pepito Ngo.

The championship rounds take off on Dec. 26 and 29.

Participants who will score 1 or 1.5 points will have their championship round on Dec 26.

RP cyclists rule Tour of Thailand



IRISH Valenzuela: Top RP rider

THE NATIONAL ROAD TEAM CAPPED AN AMAZING YEAR FOR Philippine cycling by emerging overall team champion of the Tour of Thailand that ended yesterday in the mountain resort city of Chiang Mai.

What they failed to accomplish in the recent 24th Southeast Asian Games in Nakhon Ratchasima they pulled off with a flourish in the bikathon that covered 999 kilometers in northern Thailand.

The Philippines led the general team classification from the first day of the six-stage competition (Official times were not immediately available, according to PhilCycling, the national sports association for cycling).

For emerging as overall champion, the Nationals also ruled the Asean division of the competition.

Japan's well-travelled Team A finished second to the Filipinos, who were led by the promising Irish Valenzuela. The 20-year-old placed second in the first stage and went on to become the best-placed Filipino at fifth in the individual standings.

Rounding out the top 10 in the general team classification of the Category 2.2 race sanctioned by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) were Thailand in third, followed by Iran, Malaysia, the mixed team Giant Asia, Merida Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Vietnam.

Seventeen teams started the race but four backed out, including Thailand's Team B which ran out of riders because of injury.

Ahad Kazemi of Iran was the overall individual champion with Indonesia's Tonton Susanto, who raced for the Danish team, second.

Third was Iran's Hosein Jahanbanian, followed by SEA Games ITT gold medalist Mahawong Prajak of Thailand in fourth.

Lloyd Reynante landed in ninth place and Victor Espiritu, winner of the SEA Games gold in the track point race, was 16th. Ronald Gorantes placed 37th.

"The riders were still at their peak," said head coach Jomel Lorenzo. "The program for 2007 was to have the riders reach their peak in the SEA Games and it was timely that the Tour of Thailand came just two days after the Games ended."

"It is indeed an amazing year for cycling. This is a morale-boosting and an inspiring performance from our cyclists," said PhilCycling president Bert Lina.

Cycling emerged second only to swimming as the best-performing sport for the RP delegation in the SEA Games with four gold medals. Swimming had eight.

Aside from Espiritu, the other cycling gold medalists were Baby Marites Bitbit in the women's massed-start road race, Alfie Catalan in the men's track individual pursuit and Joey Barba in mountain bike's men's downhill event.

In Lorenzo's initial report to Lina yesterday, he said a Filipino-Dutch raced for the Merida Netherlands. Malaya Van Palpalatoc Ruitenbeek, who topped the fifth stage on Thursday, has a Filipino mother who hails from Cagayan Valley. He speaks Ilocano and Tagalog and occasionally chatted with the Filipinos.

La Salle golfers just too dogged for Ateneo crew

By Musong R. Castillo

TAGAYTAY—ATENEO TOOK THE final battle, but a victory in the singles matches could not prevent La Salle from winning the war.

The Blue Eagles scored a 10.5-7.5 victory over the Archers in the final-day singles of their Ryder Cup-style match play yesterday and all they could do was make the scores closer than they were overnight, 24-18.

La Salle formally won the event for the third straight year with Miko Alejandro again standing at the forefront of its searing charge.

He whipped Gab Atienza, 5 and 3, for a perfect five points and got the Archers on track in another windswept day at the rolling Tagaytay Midlands here.

Former Asia-Pacific Seniors champion Tommy Manotoc jumped out to an early 4-hole lead and never looked back, cruising to a 2-and-1 win over Marty Ilagan, before Justin Tambunting scored the biggest shocker of the day by outlasting reigning RP Amateur champion Anthony Fernando.

Crucial victory

Tambunting birdied his last three holes and erased a 2-hole deficit with five holes to play in what turned out to be one of the most crucial victories for the Archers, who took a nine-point lead going into yesterday's matches and needed just five points to clinch the duel.

"Our mind-set was to go out there and take no prisoners," Manotoc, who manages the Calatagan Golf and Country Club in Batangas, said. "They (Eagles) fought very hard and made us work for it (win). Overall, it was a good match."

Fernando, whose inclusion into the Ateneo roster sort of leveled the playing field, wound up winless in five matches, having drawn just one match and losing all the rest.

Clinched after 10 matches

La Salle actually clinched the match after just 10 matches, but the rival schools refused to call the other matches that were still being played.

Ateneo drew first blood as 14-year-old Marcel Puyat overwhelmed the favored King Stehmeier, 9-and-7, but La Salle quickly regained momentum behind the 19-year-old Alejandro and Manotoc who both in a couple of matches behind.

Anya Tanpinco, who won the individual silver medal and helped the Filipino ladies to a second-place finish in the recent Southeast Asian Games in Thailand, was also in complete command against Leana Farrales and prevailed, 3 and 2, for La Salle.

Francis Gaston, the former RP Am and Seniors champion, and Kim Hong halved the points in their respective matches with Jun Jun Plana and Lovelyn Guioguio for the crucial fifth point La Salle needed at the start of the day.

Also chalking up victories for the Archers were JP Reyes, a 2-and-1 winner over former Ateneo basketball player Jeric Hechanova, and Justin Limjap, who tripped Benjie Sarmiento, 4 and 2.

LA SALLE'S Miko Yee (left) chips in from the fringe of the 16th green in his match against Ateneo's Manoling Chan. The duel ended in a draw.

John Gobing, Mari Hechanova, Jingy Tuason, Jovi Neri, Yoyong Velez, Bayani Garcia, Joel Bernaldez and former Asia-Pacific Seniors' champion Iggy Clavecilla posted victories for the Eagles.

Lawyer Manoling Chan of Ateneo held seasoned Miko Yee to a draw in the final match of the dual meet.

Gobing was a 4-and-3 victor over Jenz Tecson; Mari Hechanova pulled off a 2-and-1 win over Marco Olives; Tuason turned back the long-hitting Oliver Gan, 5 and 3; Neri took the measure of Bones Floro, 2-and-1; Velez crushed Sammy Sy, 4-and-2; Garcia nipped Chuckie Hong, 2-and-1; Bernaldez upset Raffy Garcia, 3-up, and Clavecilla dominated Brixton Aw, 3 and 2.

Protectors, San Mig five eye outright finals seats

GAMES TODAY
(The Arena, San Juan)
2 p.m.—Hapee vs Toyota Balintawak
4 p.m.—Harbour Centre vs San Mig Coffee

ALTHOUGH UNtouchable in 10 games, Hapee Toothpaste admits to the pressure of sustaining a record run.

Another win today will propel the Complete Protectors to the PBL finals, just two days after setting the longest winning streak in league history.

"It's very hard," said coach Jun Noel after barely completing the feat with an 83-80 triumph over Toyota Balintawak in Game 1 of the best-of-three semifinals.

"We're very pressured. It's not easy to sustain a winning game."

But the Complete Protectors vow to remain ready as they try to sweep the Road Kings for the first championship berth in the V-Go Extreme Energy Drink Cup at 2 p.m. today at The Arena in San Juan.

San Mig Coffee also aims to repeat its stunning semifinal win over Harbour Centre at 4 p.m. to advance to the finals.

"We want to grab it in Game 2," said Noel. "But we have to regroup. We know they'll make adjustments also."

Reed Juntilla pulled off the nail-biting Game 1 triumph by burying a triple with one-tenth of a second left to lead the Complete Protectors not just closer to the finals, but also past the nine-game record streak set by the 1998 Tanduay squad.

The Road Kings threatened to end the Complete Protectors' amazing run when JV Casio nailed a triple with 2.9 seconds left to cap a rally from 19 points down, before Juntilla's game-winning shot.

Casio's clutch-shooting, along with the strong performances of Erwin Sta. Maria, Erick Rodriguez and Cholo Villanueva, gave coach Ariel Vanguardia enough confidence in Game 2.

"It's not yet over for us," said Vanguardia. "It just so happened that we gave up so many fouls."

Batang Pier, too, aims to turn the series around and resume its bid for a fourth straight championship.

Coach Jorge Gallent emphasized, though, that Solomon Mercado needs more support after the Fil-Am guard singlehandedly carried Batang Pier with a conference-high 33 points on an exceptional 8-of-9 shooting from three-point range.

The Coffee Kings proved that they made the right decision in inserting San Beda recruits mid-season as Pong Escobal and 6-foot-8 Nigerian Sam Ekwe powered them to an 80-72 upset over Batang Pier in the semifinal opener.

"My players were rusty, they struggled defensively against Escobal and Ekwe," said Gallent. "The other San Mig players also played well, so we have to make adjustments."

The first game will be televised at 5 p.m. over BTV.

Jasmine W. Payo

Blemish-free 66 puts Que 2 off in Thailand

NONGKHAI, THAILAND—THAI VETERAN Boonchu Ruangkit produced a grandstand finish with three closing birdies on Friday to take a slender one-stroke lead into the final round of the Singha E San Open.

The defending champion shot a five-under-par 66 for a three-round total of 14-under-par 199 at Victory Park Golf and Country Club.

He is a shot ahead of in-form countryman Prayad Marksaeng, who started the day three behind the overnight leader but closed the gap with a blistering 64.

Angelo Que of the Philippines, bidding for his second win on the Asean Golf Tour, is in third spot, a further stroke behind after carding a blemish-free 66.

Thai rising star Sattaya Supupramai stayed in the hunt with an accomplished 67 to secure fourth place on 202, a shot adrift of Que.

The $50,000 Singha E San Open is the fifth leg of the tour that was launched to create more playing opportunities for professionals from Southeast Asia and unearth new talent.

Leading scores (a denotes amateur):

199—Boonchu Ruangkit (THA) 64-69-66; 200—Prayad Marksaeng (THA) 67-69-64; 201—**Angelo Que (PHI) 70-65-66**; 202—Sattaya Supupramai (THA) 70-65-67; 204—Kwanchai Tannin (THA) 66-70-68; 205—Thaworn Wiratchant (THA) 66-69-70, Tepphatud Sanawong (THA) 71-71-63; 207—Nakul Vijityuthasart (THA) 70-68-69; 208—Wisut Artjanawat (THA) 74-68-66; 209—Udom Duangdecha (THA) 68-70-71, Atthaphon Prathummanee (THA) 70-71-68, Pijit Petchkasem (THA) 71-71-67, Thanyakorn Krongpha (THA) (a) 71-72-66, Varut Chomchalam (THA) (a) 71-72-66; 210—Kiradech Apibalrat (THA) 71-69-70, Pornsakon Tipsanit (THA) 75-68-67, **Mars Pucay (PHI) 74-71-65.**

AFP

TOAST TO RP FOOTBALL

Fédération Internationale de Football Association (Fifa) president Joseph Blatter (sixth from left) joins members and friends of the Philippine Football Federation in a recent cocktail at the Sofitel Philippine Plaza. Blatter, arguably the most powerful sports official in the world, urged football enthusiasts to support the game. Also in photo are (from left) Qatar Ambassador Abdulla Ahmed Al-Mutawaa, Asian Footbal Confederation president Mohamad Binhammam, Saudi Arabia Ambassador Mohammed Ameen, Ateneo program head for football Jong Castañeda, PLDT SVP for business solutions Eric Alberto, Coke Go-For-Goal founder Rene Adad, Pagcor corporation's corporate communications chief Edward F. King, PFF president Mari Martinez and Asean Football Federation VP Matusin Matasan.

Cebu batters ready to wrap up title series

GAMES TODAY (*Rizal ballpark*)
9 a.m.—Exhibition Game
1 p.m.—Cebu vs Manila (Game 2)

By Marc Anthony Reyes

JOSEPH ORILLANA IS AGAIN EXpected to suit up for Cebu and that spells trouble for the Manila Sharks as the Dolphins attempt to wrap up the Baseball Philippines Series 2 championship at the Rizal Memorial Ballpark.

Orillana, a member of the national team, flustered the Sharks' batters no end in Game 1 of the three-game title series Wednesday, yielding just three hits and fanning out six batters.

The Dolphins worked behind their pitcher and feasted on the tired, predictable throws of Orillana's fellow National Charlie Labrador to draw first blood, 6-3.

"*Nilaro-laro ko lang 'yung* batters *nila, binigyan ko sa alanganin* (I worked on the weakness of their batters)," said Orillana, who plays for La Salle in the UAAP.

That doesn't sit well with Manila team manager Joehl Palanog, who vows revenge in today's Game 2.

"We need to make adjustments and hopefully we can match up the intensity they (Dolphins) showed in Game 1," he said.

Palanog relied heavily on Labrador, who appeared spent from his stint in the recent Thailand Southeast Asian Games. The Sharks' first-choice pitcher gave up 15 hits before Romeo Jasmin took over in the last 2/3 inning.

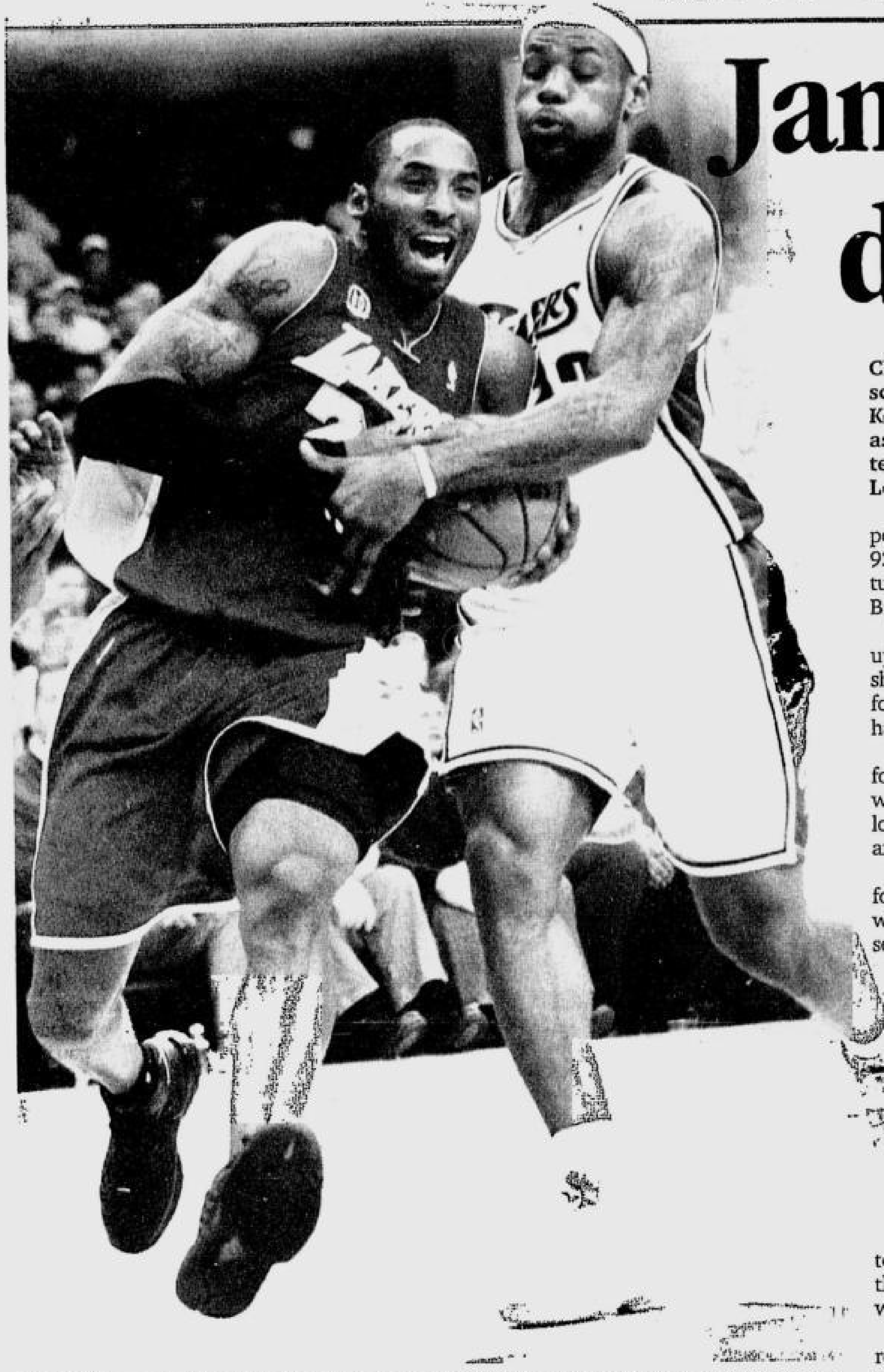
Labrador, the RP team ace, fanned five batters but also yielded five runs.

In contrast, Orillana—pitching without relief—added to Cebu's offensive sock by doubling twice and walking at the top of the eighth inning.

Big-hitter Miggy Corcuera ignited the inning with a bouncing single to centerfield, scoring RP team member Jonash Ponce.

But it was the unheralded Jerome Bacarisas who made the hit that floored the Sharks. After flying out twice and fanning out once, he blasted a big double that scored Orillana and Emerson Atilano for the marginal runs.

Cebu team manager Isaac Bacarisas, also the mentor of the triumphant Blu Boys in the SEAG, said Game 2 will be decided at the mound.



LEBRON James isn't just Cleveland's best offensive bet. When it comes to the crunch, he can play defense too, like he did against Kobe Bryant in the Cavs' game against the Lakers. REUTERS

James, Cavaliers shut down Kobe, Lakers

CLEVELAND—LEBRON JAMES scored 33 points and shut down Kobe Bryant in the closing minute as his Cleveland Cavaliers registered a 94-90 home win over the Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday.

James scored four consecutive points to give the Cavaliers the lead at 92-90 with 1:44 remaining, then turned his attention to fellow All-Star Bryant.

The Cleveland star won the matchup as Bryant missed his next three shots, including a three-pointer with four seconds remaining that would have given the Lakers the lead.

"I pretty much knew he was going for the win," James told reporters. "I was hoping it didn't go in. The shot looked good when I turned around and it looked like it was going in."

Daniel Gibson, who had 15 points for Cleveland, then sealed the win with a pair of free throws with three seconds to go.

"Coach got on us bad about our defensive effort, and we found a way to get the defensive stops late in the game and got a big win," James said after getting 10 rebounds and five assists to go with his 12-of-29 performance from the floor.

Bryant finished with 21 points on 8-of-22 shooting. He scored only two points in the fourth quarter when the Lakers were outscored 21-12.

"We just didn't shoot the ball down the stretch," Bryant said. "We didn't score in the last 3:30-4:00 and you can't win a ballgame when you don't score down the stretch."

Los Angeles enjoyed a 78-67 lead with 2:15 left in the third quarter but Cleveland scored the next 16 points.

The Cavaliers had six straight points to close out the third quarter down 78-73, then scored the first 10 points of the fourth quarter to go ahead 83-78.

The Lakers came back to take a 90-88 lead with 3:57 remaining but did not score another point against James and the Cavaliers' defense.

Anderson Varejao had 11 points and 15 rebounds as the Cavaliers beat the Lakers in Cleveland for the fourth straight time.

Lamar Odom added 19 points and 11 rebounds for Los Angeles with Derek Fisher scoring 18 points and Andrew Bynum getting 17.

Anthony Carter's jumper with four seconds left gave the Denver Nuggets a 112-111 double-overtime win over the Houston Rockets. Carmelo Anthony had 37 points and Allen Iverson 36 to lead the Nuggets.

Yao Ming powered the Rockets with 26 points and 19 rebounds. Luther Heard added 22.

Vince Carter scored 31 points and Richard Jefferson added 29 as the New Jersey Nets rallied to beat the Miami Heat 107-103 in overtime.

Jason Kidd contributed 11 rebounds and 10 assists for the Nets, while Dwyane Wade topped Miami with 41 points. *Reuters*

Payton wants to join Celtics

WALTHAM—EX-CELTICS point guard Gary Payton watched on television from his Las Vegas home Wednesday night as his former team lost to the Pistons. And once Chauncey Billups hit the winning free throws to seal the win, Payton called his agent.

"He called me and said, 'Hey, I'm reminding you that the Celtics are a team I feel like I can help,'" said agent Aaron Goodwin.

The Celtics have been pleased with the play of second-year point guard Rajon Rondo. But there has been a feeling that Boston still needs a veteran backup at the position.

The Celtics have Eddie House, a 3-point threat who isn't considered a true point guard, and rookie Gabe Pruitt. And when the Celtics struggled to bring the ball up the court because of the Pistons' pressure defense when Rondo was out in the fourth quarter, the issue again presented itself.

Coach Doc Rivers said the Celtics "would be in trouble" if Rondo got hurt, but he also likes his roster.

Rivers said he hasn't talked to anyone in Celtics management about Payton. Goodwin said that while he has talked to Danny Ainge several times about Payton, the Celtics' basketball boss hasn't shown strong interest.

"I like my team and I would kind of like to play this a little bit longer and see where we go," said Rivers. *NYT News Service*

Jeter reserves judgment on Clemens

NEW YORK—NEW YORK YANKEES captain Derek Jeter Thursday urged people to reserve judgment on Roger Clemens, a day after Boston pitcher Curt Schilling called on the seven-time Cy Young award winner to disprove allegations of steroid use.

Clemens, who was the most prominent Major Leaguer named in the Mitchell Report on performance-enhancing drugs in baseball released last week, has denied using steroids.

"It seems right now a lot of people are rushing to judgment. You have to let it play out a little bit before you say he is guilty or not guilty," Jeter said.

Jeter's support was something of a contrast to Schilling's comments on Wednesday on his blog, 38pitches.com.

Schilling, while saying that he has tremendous respect for Clemens, said that Clemens should surrender three of his seven Cy Young awards if he can't provide a credible defense for the allegations.

Former Senator Majority Leader George Mitchell wrote in his report that Clemens' former trainer, Brian McNamee, said he injected Clemens with steroids in 1998 while with the Toronto Blue Jays, and steroids and human growth hormone in 2000 and 2001 while the righthander was with the Yankees.

Clemens, who won four Cy Youngs from 1997-2004, has denied the accusations in a statement released through his agent.

"So as a fan my thought is that Roger will find a way in short order to organize a legal team to guarantee a retraction of the allegations made, a public apology is made, and his name is completely cleared," Schilling wrote. *AFP*

Tiger Woods: The star is also a fan

TIGER Woods owns two signed sports memorabilia. REUTERS

THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA—ONE of the most coveted autograph in sports is Tiger Woods, who signs sparingly at golf tournaments, more than he likes when requests are brought to him, and who has a deal with Upper Deck to combat forgeries.

There aren't many autographs he wants in return, but Woods recently got a prized possession—a baseball signed by US Hall of Fame pitcher Sandy Koufax.

"How about that?" Woods said, breaking into a broad smile when asked about the autograph.

Why is Koufax so meaningful to him?

For one thing, Woods said they share the same birthday (Dec. 30), although Koufax arrived on earth 40 years earlier. Additionally, Woods grew up a Los Angeles Dodgers fan, and besides Jackie Robinson, he can think of no other player who better epitomizes his team.

"I've been a Dodger fan my entire life, and Koufax is the man," he said.

Woods asked an official at Upper Deck that if he ever ran into Koufax, would he ask for an autograph. The next time Woods saw him, the Upper Deck rep handed him a baseball.

"It's got a personal inscription," Woods said. "It's at home in my bedroom, sitting right there."

Woods said it was only the second autograph of a sports figure he has sought in his life. The other came about a dozen years ago when he met Muhammad Ali. He wound up getting a signed pair of boxing trunks that Ali wore in a fight in 1977.

"I had never asked for any autograph ever, and I said to him, 'Could you please sign anything, a paper, anything, please?' He was shaking (from Parkinson's Disease) and said, 'I'll take care of it.' All of a sudden, I had a a pair of trunks. He said, 'I won't be needing these anymore.' I've got those hanging on my wall." *AP*

Dog ate World Series ball, says pitcher

BOSTON—THE WORLD SERIES ball is gone, and Jonathan Papelbon has an excuse: My dog ate it.

The Red Sox closer insists that is what happened to the souvenir from the final out of Boston's sweep this year. Really, Papelbon blamed it on his bulldog, Boss.

"He plays with baseballs like they are his toys," Papelbon told the Hattiesburg (Mississippi) American. "He jumped up one day on the counter and snatched it. He likes rawhide. He tore that thing to pieces."

While the Red Sox have swept two of the past four World Series, they've had less luck when it comes to preserving the ball that was caught for the final out. It took a prolonged negotiation before first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz agreed to donate the 2004 ball to the Hall of Fame.

Papelbon, who has a home in Hattiesburg, struck out Colorado pinch-hitter Seth Smith to finish off Game 4 on Oct. 28. Papelbon threw his glove high in the air while catcher Jason Varitek tucked the ball in his back pocket.

After the game, Varitek said he planned to give the prize to the team. A few days later, he said he'd given it to Papelbon. The reliever said Boss got hold of that doggone ball.

PAPELBON

The fate of the last ball became an issue in 2004 when the Red Sox swept St. Louis in the World Series to end an 86-year championship drought.

Mientkiewicz kept the ball and eventually agreed to lend the ball to the Red Sox for a year and then donated it to the Hall of Fame. The Red Sox didn't sound particularly concerned with what happened to this latest souvenir.

"The 2004 ball is obviously very special to us because it was the club's first World Series win in 86 years," spokesman John Blake said. "This ball was in the hands of one of the players and we take his word at what happened to it." *AP*

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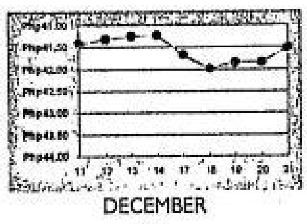
Export growth for 2007 seen at a low 6%

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES



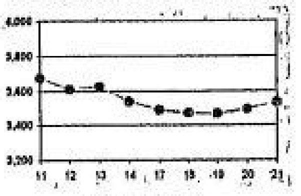
PESO-DOLLAR RATE

P41.52 = $1

As of 5 p.m., Dec. 21, 2007

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

Stocks up 1.2%

SHARES CLOSED 1.2-PERCENT higher yesterday a day after the central bank trimmed its key interest rates to slow the peso's rise against the dollar, dealers said.

Yearend selective buying by fund managers of issues with promising 2008 profit prospects also boosted stocks, but trading was generally subdued ahead of the four-day Christmas break, they said.

The composite index rose 41.02 points to 3,532.98, off a low of 3,491.96.

The broader all-share index gained 26.53 points to 2,176.74.

Gainers outnumbered decliners 67 to 39 while 56 stocks ended flat.

A total of 13.1 billion shares worth P2.8 billion changed hands.

"The (25 basis-point) rate cut was comfortably used as a catalyst since this lowers the cost of money, while providing investors with a short-term buying opportunity," said Jose Vistan of AB Capital Securities.

"The rate cut benefited large-cap issues and the industry lead-

STOCKS/ B2

BSP cites slowing US economy, strong peso

By Michelle V. Remo

THE BANGKO SENTRAL NG PILIPINAS SAID the country's merchandise exports were likely to grow by only 6 percent this year, slower than the official government target of 11 percent.

BSP Deputy Governor Diwa Guinigundo told reporters that the slower-than-target exports growth for the year took into account the anemic performance of exports in the first 10 months of the year in terms of meeting the target.

In January to October, exports grew by only 5.4 percent to $41.85 billion. The BSP said a double-digit growth was no longer possible.

The BSP's pronouncements echoed the earlier projection made by the National Economic and Development Authority, which said exports were likely to grow this year by anywhere between 6 and 7 percent.

"The same factors are considered in the exports forecast—slowdown in the US economy and tight competition among electronics exporters," Guinigundo said in a briefing yesterday.

He explained that competition among electronics exporters led to reduced prices. The lower-than-target exports for this year was not a matter of volume, but because of price cuts.

The US economy, weighed down by the subprime credit crisis that started in the middle of the year, is the Philippines' biggest export market accounting for about 17 percent of Philippine exports.

Besides the slowdown of the US economy, exporters also blamed the strong peso for the weaker-than-expected growth of their sector.

The BSP said the peso averaged at 41.8 against the dollar from January to Dec. 21 this year, much stronger than the assumption of between 47 and 49 made by economic managers when they drafted this year's

EXPORT/ B2

NBN project to be bid out to local telcos in '08

By Riza T. Olchondra

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSportation and Communication (DOTC) is studying various options for financing the new version of the national broadband network project that will be bid out to local telecommunication companies next year.

Transportation and Communication Secretary Leandro Mendoza told reporters that the national government may no longer use the $329.4-million loan for the original NBN, which was scrapped following a Senate investigation into allegations of bribery and other irregularities.

Instead, the government will likely get fresh funding from the European Eximbank, Korea Eximbank, China Eximbank, the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund when it has determined the budget for the new version of the NBN project.

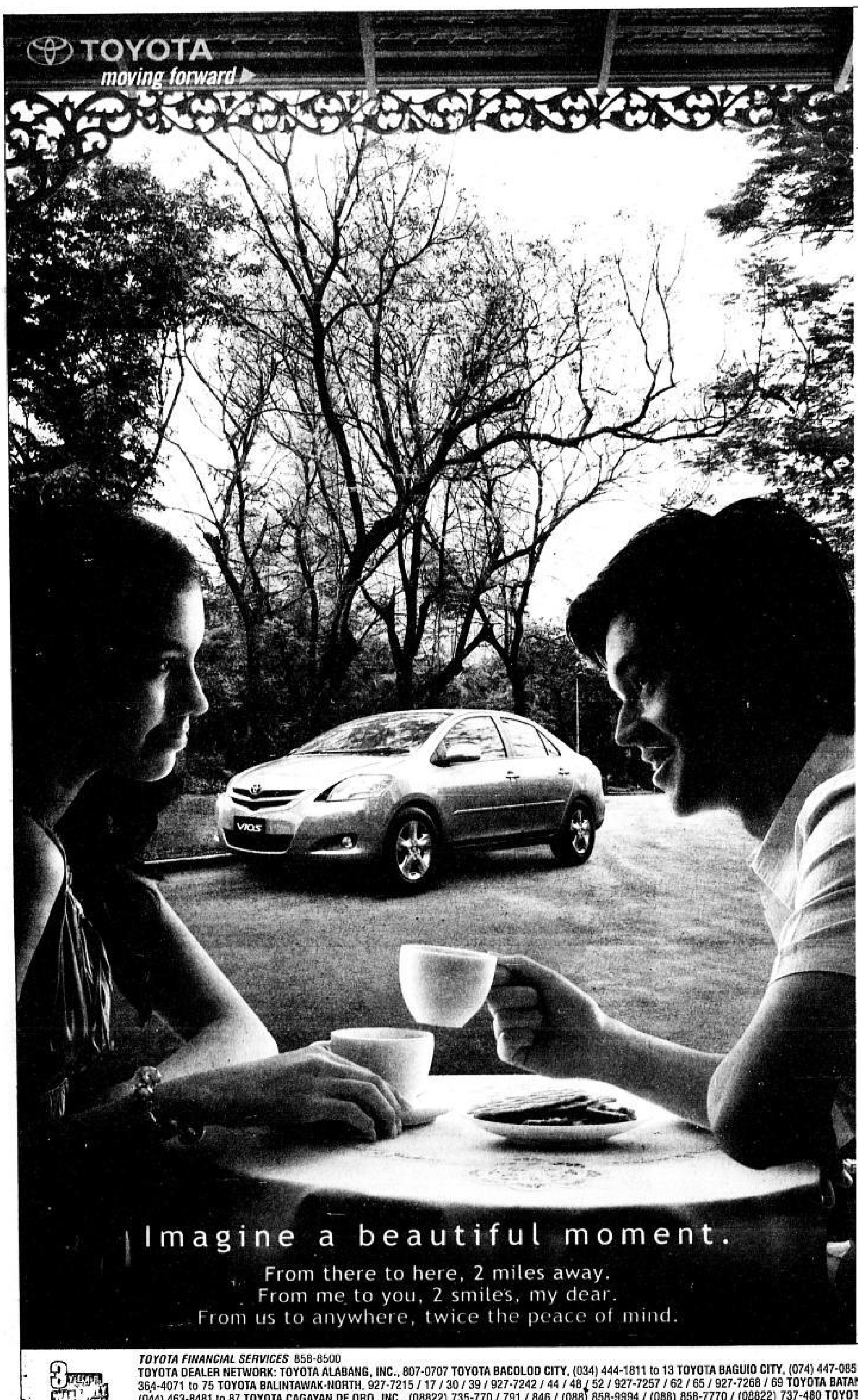
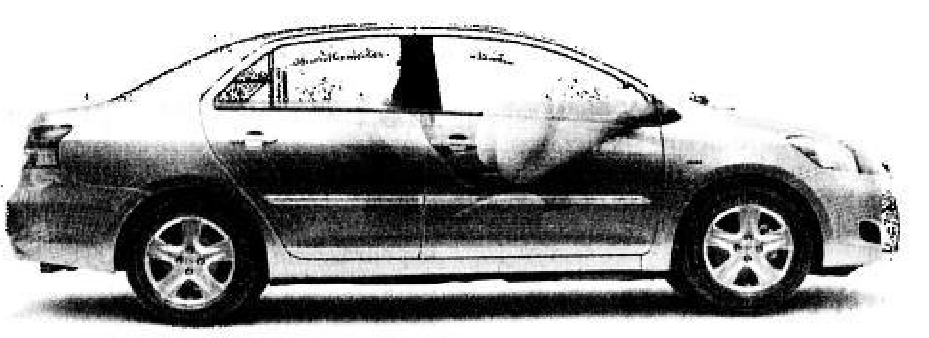
Thus far, DOTC has given leading telcos a list of requirements and the quality of service needed.

"The DOTC's exploratory talks with Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co., Globe Telecom, Bayan Telecommunication and Digitel started Oct. 9. It (focused) on how the government can lower the gov-

NBN PROJECT/ B2

IN THIS ISSUE

10-mo VAT collection hits P121.2B /B5

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SEC okays Viva IPO; offer period on Jan. 14-21

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE Commission (SEC) has approved the plan by movie outfit Viva Communications Inc. to offer up to P1.2 billion worth of new shares.

The offer period is from Jan. 14 to 21. The listing date is tentatively set for Jan. 25.

In documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Viva Com said that in 2008, net proceeds from the IPO were estimated at P1.09 billion after deducting expenses incurred for the public offer.

Close to 40 percent of the net IPO proceeds will be spent for content creation and acquisition, in particular the production of six films in the first quarter of 2008.

Viva Com plans to co-produce two movies with Star Cinema Productions with a budget of about P34 million each.

The four other films will be produced by the company at a budget of roughly P21.5 million a movie.

In the first half of 2008, Viva Com is also allotting P60 million for the production of 10 concerts featuring local and foreign talents with an estimated budget of about P4.5 million each.

Aside from content creation, 22 percent of the net IPO proceeds will be spent for content production and distribution—which includes producing programming for three additional cable channels that use content from Viva Com's film library and the restoration of the company's film library and purchase of equipment necessary for archiving.

Another P20 million will be used for training and development of artists and talents and P403 million will be used to pay existing loans and other obligations.

Including shares to be sold by existing shareholders, Viva Com's offer size could rise to as much as P1.85 billion.

The company is offering 142.9 million shares at between P9.72 and P12.93 apiece.

Of the total offer, 92.86 million shares will comprise primary or new shares that can rise up to P1.2 billion for the company at the maximum price range proposed.

The IPO will make 35 percent of the company public.

The secondary offering or shares to be sold by existing shareholders will consist of 49.99 million shares, which could raise P646 million for the selling shareholder.

The company reported a net income of P145.55 million for the first 10 months of the year. No comparative figures were available. For 2006, Viva Com's net income was P60.93 million.

Viva Com was established in 1981 to consolidate the Viva Group of Companies' various media outfits.

Viva Com is composed of film production arm Viva Productions Inc., talent development and management company Viva Artists' Agency and home video distributor Viva Video Inc.

ABS-CBN settles $31-M loan

TELEVISION NETWORK ABS-CBN BROADcasting Corp. said it has drawn on a P1.4-billion loan from a Banco de Oro-EPCI facility to repay existing debt.

In a disclosure, ABS-CBN assistant secretary Enrique Quiason said the proceeds of the loan were used to repay in full the $31-million debt of the company.

The loan with Banco de Oro has a term of five years, maturing on Dec. 20, 2012.

As of Sept. 30, ABS-CBN's total interest-bearing loans and borrowings increased 17 percent to P5.33 billion, from P4.57 billion as of end 2006.

ABS-CBN's net debt to equity remained at 0.21 times.

The network reported its nine-month income doubled to P1.1 billion from P551 million in the same period last year, due to improvement in advertising businesses and the rising contribution of its subscription-based operations.

This brings ABS-CBN beyond its earlier full-year net income goal of P1 billion.

"We think P1.2 to P1.4 billion is achievable given the levels we're at already," ABS-CBN chief finance officer Miguel Navarrete had said.

In the third quarter, net income grew 171 percent to P365 million from P134 million in the same period last year.

Consolidated revenues increased 14 percent to P14.5 billion from P12.69 billion in the nine-month period, driven by higher airtime revenues and sale of services. Airtime revenues grew 23 percent to P9.9 billion on the back of improving ratings and higher advertising volume.

Direct sales, which consisted of both sale of services and goods from subsidiaries, rose 10 percent year-on-year to P4.2 billion in the nine-month period on the back of ABS-CBN Global's and ABS-CBN Film's contributions.

Export growth for 2007 …

From page B1

budget program.

Last year, the peso averaged at 51.39 to a dollar, the BSP noted.

A stronger peso makes Philippine-made goods more expensive in dollar terms and therefore less competitive in the world market. Given this, exporters have asked the government to intervene in the foreign exchange market and stem the rise of the peso.

The other day, the BSP cut its key policy rates by 25 basis points, a move perceivably intended to temper the continued rise of the local currency. It was the fourth time this year that the BSP cut its key policy rates.

With the cut, the BSP's overnight borrowing rate now stands at 5.25 percent and the overnight lending rate at 7.25 percent.

Stocks …

From page B1

ers which realized gains today. Low interest rates means they have access to cheaper money (and) this fueled today's rally," said Lawrence de Leon of Accord Capital Equities.

"The rate cut in a way is taking some of the gloom that has hounded the market recently," said Ron Rodrigo of DBP Daiwa Securities.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. added P15 to P3,030.

Rate-sensitive banking and property counters were the day's biggest gainers, with Bank of the Philippine Islands adding P2 to P60. Banco de Oro rose P2 to P60.50, while Metropolitan Bank edged up by a peso to P55.

Financial markets will be closed next Monday and Tuesday. Trading resumes on Wednesday. *AFP*

Filinvest Land to buy back shares

PROPERTY FIRM FILINVEST Land Inc. has received the consent of its board of directors to buy back up to P1.5 billion of its shares in the stock market.

FLI closed yesterday at P1.34 a share.

"In view of the strong financial performance of the company and the very large discrepancy between the current share price and the net asset value of the company, the board of directors of the company authorized, effective immediately, a buyback of the shares of stock of the company," FLI corporate information officer Abner Gener Jr. said in a disclosure yesterday.

Gener said that the buyback would take place over a period of 12 months subject to periodic review by management.

FLI said its net income surged 96 percent to P1.3 billion in the first nine months from P666 million in the same period last year, buoyed by residential sales and rental income.

"The jump in earnings was due to the strong sales take-up of FLI's residential projects, as well as the rental income contribution from Filinvest Supermall and the company's office buildings, mainly from Northgate Cyberzone, which currently has eight buildings fully leased out to business process outsourcing firms," said FLI president Joseph M. Yap in an earlier statement to the Philippine Stock Exchange.

Yap said revenues from real estate sales reached P2.3 billion as the company's core business of affordable and middle-income housing continued to enjoy strong demand, including from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

"Aside from offering new products, we have expanded to other regional growth centers during the past two years and continue to experience strong take-up from our projects in Tarlac, Pampanga, Davao and Cebu. This represents a 32-percent increase in core real estate development sales from the same period last year," he added. ***Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson***

NBN project to be bid out to local telcos in '08

From page B1

ernment's ballooning telecom expenses," he said. "The DOTC has formed a technical working group to flesh out the telecom needs of the government and to see how the private sector can meet them at the best price possible."

"(For example), for central offices we need at least 2 mbps connection, that is the committed rate and not the burst speed. The telcos will come up with comments and suggestions as far as NBN functionalities are concerned. The government will then, taking all of these into consideration, prepare the terms of reference. We will then tender it, then they will submit (their offers). At the very least we should do (the bidding) by next year," DOTC Assistant Secretary Lorenzo Formoso III said in an earlier interview.

The government's telecommunication project generally endeavors to interconnect government offices down to the municipal level.

Mendoza said the secure interconnection of government offices is mandated by the E-Commerce Law and by the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan for the period 2004 to 2010, as well as the digital infrastructure component of President Macapagal-Arroyo's 10-Point Agenda.

CURRENCIES

December 21, 2007 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.698080	1.000000	41.7950
Japan	Yen	0.006173	0.008843	0.3696
United Kingdom	Pound	1.384363	1.983100	82.8837
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.089479	0.128179	5.3572
Switzerland	Franc	0.602676	0.863334	36.0830
Canada	Dollar	0.697453	0.999101	41.7574
Singapore	Dollar	0.478465	0.685401	28.6463
Australia	Dollar	0.599365	0.858590	35.8848
Bahrain	Dinar*	1.859019	2.663045	111.3020
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.186155	0.266667	11.1453
Brunei	Dollar	0.476831	0.683060	28.5485
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000074	0.000106	0.0044
Thailand	Baht	0.022850	0.032733	1.3681
UAE	Dirham	0.190083	0.272294	11.3805
EU	Euro	1.000000	1.432500	59.8713
Korea	Won	0.000740	0.001060	0.0443
China	Yuan**	0.094727	0.135696	5.6714
Denmark	Kroner	0.133999	0.191953	8.0227
India	Rupee	0.017713	0.025374	1.0605
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.208382	0.298507	12.4761
New Zealand	Dollar	0.528448	0.757002	31.6389
Sweden	Kroner	0.105760	0.151501	6.3320
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.021495	0.030792	1.2870

Source: Reuters' forex closing prices as of NY time—Dec. 20, 2007
* Various banks in Bahrain as quoted in Reuters' Screen. ** Asian time closing rate as of Dec. 20, 2007

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 21, 2007)

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
		BANKS					
17.5	6.8	Asiatrust Development Bank Inc.	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.3	30,000
73	44	Banco de Oro-EPCI Inc.	59	61	59	60.5	10,012,800
73.5	53	Bank of the Philippine Islands	59	60	59	60	1,149,300
748	544	China Banking Corp.	655	655	650	650	620
23.75	14	Citystate Savings Bank	23.5	23.75	23.5	23.75	2,000
0.63	0.36	Export and Industry Bank Inc.	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	490,000
75.5	47.5	Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co.	55.5	56	55	55	1,015,200
65.5	39	Philippine National Bank	46.5	48	46.5	48	4,000
68	48	Philippine Savings Bank	59.5	60	59.5	60	3,000
39.57	20.43	Rizal Commercial Banking Corp.	24	24	23.5	23.5	385,600
90	65	Security Bank Corp.	77	77	77	77	143,300
66	42	Union Bank of the Philippines	43	43.5	43	43	37,800
		OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					
2.22	0.6	Bankard Inc.	1.86	1.86	1.8	1.84	414,000
16.25	4.6	CitisecOnline.com Inc.	10.5	11	10.5	11	626,900
43.5	29	First Metro Investment Corp.	43.5	43.5	43.5	43.5	200
5.9	4.6	I-Remit Inc.	4.65	4.75	4.65	4.75	16,000
6.8	1.74	Makati Finance Corp.	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	1,000
1,970.00	1,580.00	Manulife Financial Corp.	1,615.00	1,615.00	1,615.00	1,615.00	10
5	2.7	National Reinsurance Corp. of the Phils.	3.15	3.2	3.15	3.2	932,000
1,390.00	272.5	The Philippine Stock Exchange Inc.	1,015.00	1,025.00	1,015.00	1,020.00	8,950
1.94	1.3	IVantage Corp.	1.7	1.7	1.66	1.66	2,360,000
		ELECTRICITY, ENERGY, POWER & WATER					
6.2	3.8	Aboitiz Power Corp.	5	5.3	5	5.2	1,495,000
0.57	0.22	East Asia Power Resources Corp.	0.39	0.4	0.39	0.4	150,000
70.5	49	First Gen Corp.	60.5	60.5	60.5	60.5	23,200
92	58	First Phil. Holdings Corp.	72.5	74	72.5	73	176,300
18.75	8.8	Manila Water Co. Inc.	18.5	18.75	18.5	18.5	3,128,500
105.45	48.64	Manila Electric Co.	80	81.5	80	80.5	577,400
7.8	4.3	PNOC Energy Development Corp.	6.7	6.8	6.7	6.8	27,760,000
7.4	3.95	Petron Corp.	5.7	5.8	5.6	5.6	4,545,000
14.75	6.4	Phoenix Petroleum Philippines Inc.	6.8	7	6.7	6.7	158,000
2.04	0.94	Trans-Asia Oil and Energy Dev't Corp.	1.22	1.22	1.2	1.2	927,000
		FOOD, BEVERAGE & TOBACCO					
6.3	3.4	Alaska Milk Corp.	5.1	5.3	5.1	5.3	193,000
2.32	1.46	Alliance Tuna International Inc.	1.56	1.56	1.5	1.5	738,000
2.2	1.08	CADP Group Corp.	1.7	1.82	1.7	1.82	122,000
28.5	20	Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	23	23	23	23	100,000
61	40.5	Jollibee Foods Corp.	49.5	50	49.5	50	681,100
0.98	0.5	RFM Corp.	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.67	180,000
3.1	2.06	Roxas Holdings	2.85	2.85	2.85	2.85	1,070,000
80	42.5	San Miguel Corp. "A"	59.5	60.5	59.5	60	202,100
88	43	San Miguel Corp. "B"	60	61.5	60	61	493,200
20.75	13.5	Universal Robina Corp.	13.75	13.75	13.5	13.5	988,300
0.55	0.24	Vitarich Corp.	0.39	0.39	0.37	0.37	80,000
		CONSTRUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ALLIED SERVICES					
6.1	2.65	EEI Corp.	4	4.1	4	4.1	226,000
9.2	4.95	Holcim Philippines Inc.	8	8	8	8	10,000
7	3.65	Republic Cement Corp.	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.1	250,000
2	0.81	Southeast Asia Cement Holdings Inc.	0.99	0.99	0.97	0.97	530,000
23	2.12	TKC Steel Corp.	8.8	8.9	8.8	8.9	11,000
		CHEMICALS					
6.3	3.75	Chemrez Technologies Inc.	4.15	4.2	4.15	4.2	372,000
1.46	0.51	Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.8	0.85	0.8	0.85	40,000
		DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS					
9	6.2	Splash Corp.	8.1	8.1	7.9	7.9	2,674,000
		HOLDING FIRMS					
39	18.75	ABS-CBN Holdings Corp.-PDR	34	34	34	34	140,400
3.9	2.7	A. Soriano Corp.	3.4	3.45	3.4	3.45	11,020,000
0.185	0.0575	AJO.net Holdings Inc.	0.115	0.12	0.11	0.115	45,630,000
1.28	0.3	APC Group Inc.	0.59	0.62	0.59	0.59	6,360,000
3.65	1.5	ATN Holdings Inc. "A"	2.38	2.46	2.38	2.46	93,000
3.7	1.5	ATN Holdings Inc. "B"	2.5	2.95	2.5	2.85	87,000
0.0182	0.0076	Abacus Cons. Res. and Hold'gs Inc. "A"	0.0095	0.011	0.0095	0.01	12,054,000,000
0.019	0.0085	Abacus Cons. Res. and Hold'gs Inc. "B"	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.012	72,000,000
9.7	5.8	Aboitiz Equity Ventures Inc.	6.9	7	6.8	6.8	2,148,000
0.021	0.01	Alcorn Gold Resources Corp.	0.015	0.015	0.014	0.014	30,800,000
7.3	3.5	Alliance Global Group Inc.	5.2	5.5	5.1	5.3	5,468,000
1.38	0.61	Alsons Consolidated Resources Inc.	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	60,000
2.9	1.04	Anglo-Philippine Holdings Corp.	2.34	2.36	2.32	2.34	744,000
645	400	Ayala Corp.	505	515	505	510	109,190
15.25	7.83	Bacnotan Consolidated Industries Inc.	13	13	13	13	1,500
5.6	2.14	Benpres Holdings Corp.	4.5	4.7	4.5	4.65	35,895,000
12	5.6	DMCI Holdings Inc.	9.3	9.7	9.3	9.6	360,000
2.5	0.85	F and J Prince Holdings Corp. "A"	1.46	1.46	1.46	1.46	30,000
8	3.5	Filinvest Development Corp.	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.8	25,000
14.5	8.9	JG Summit Holdings Inc.	10.25	10.5	10.25	10.5	180,000
5.9	0.61	Jolliville Holdings Corp.	1.66	1.66	1.6	1.6	210,000
28	1.42	Lodestar Investment Hldgs Corp.	16	17	16	16.25	16,500
0.8	0.24	MEDCO Holdings Inc.	0.54	0.6	0.54	0.6	20,000
11.5	1.5	Minerales Industrias Corp.	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.2	645,000
8.5	3.1	PAL Holdings Inc.	6.2	6.2	6.2	6.2	4,000
0.28	0.016	Pacifica Inc. "A"	0.205	0.21	0.2	0.205	34,490,000
0.75	0.19	Prime Orion Philippines Inc.	0.51	0.53	0.51	0.53	1,480,000
2.1	1.3	Republic Glass Holdings Corp.	1.82	1.82	1.82	1.82	20,000
452.5	292.51	SM Investments Corp.	340	350	340	340	22,880
2.1	1.08	Seafront Resources Corp.	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	334,000
0.73	0.155	Sinophil Corp.	0.35	0.35	0.34	0.34	500,000
1.06	0.61	Solid Group Inc.	0.76	0.76	0.69	0.69	50,000
2.9	0.93	Vivant Corp.	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	20,000
0.75	0.12	Wellex Industries Inc.	0.28	0.29	0.28	0.29	150,000
		PROPERTY					
2.38	1	A Brown Co. Inc.	2.1	2.14	2.02	2.04	3,791,000
8.9	5	Anchor Land Holdings Inc	7.2	7.3	7.2	7.3	7,000
1.06	0.4	Araneta Properties Inc.	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56	60,000
19.25	12.08	Ayala Land Inc.	14.25	14.5	14.25	14.25	9,275,600
1.88	1	Belle Corp.	1.24	1.26	1.24	1.26	1,010,000
2.7	1.25	Cityland Development Corp.	1.62	1.62	1.62	1.62	30,000
0.86	0.4	Crown Equities Inc.	0.59	0.59	0.59	0.59	100,000
0.83	0.24	Cyber Bay Corp.	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	3,100,000
1.05	0.56	Empire East Land Holdings Inc.	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	2,550,000
0.47	0.0575	Ever Gotesco Resources and Hold'gs Inc.	0.22	0.23	0.22	0.22	2,730,000
1.48	0.61	Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.94	0.96	0.94	0.95	9,130,000
2.44	1.22	Filinvest Land Inc.	1.34	1.38	1.34	1.34	19,586,000
1.12	0.31	MRC Allied Industries Inc.	0.55	0.55	0.53	0.53	310,000
4.6	2.24	Megaworld Corp.	3.85	4	3.85	3.95	23,216,000
6.4	3.2	Metro Pacific Investments Corp.	4	4.25	4	4	109,000
0.7	0.15	Phil. Estates Corp.	0.3	0.34	0.3	0.34	70,000
0.86	0.32	Philippine Realty and Holdings Corp.	0.48	0.5	0.47	0.47	5,680,000
9.2	1.7	Polar Property Holdings Corp.	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	20,000
23	14.5	Robinson Land Corp.	16	16	16	16	2,403,000
5.9	2.08	SM Development Corp.	3.75	3.75	3.7	3.75	1,308,000
13.5	8	SM Prime Holdings Inc.	10.5	10.75	10.5	10.75	4,440,800
3.25	1.5	Shang Properties Inc.	2.2	2.2	2.18	2.2	608,000
4.5	0.38	Sta. Lucia Land Inc.	1.7	1.74	1.64	1.64	1,000,000
1.34	0.46	Suntrust Home Developers Inc.	0.59	0.59	0.58	0.58	520,000
0.49	0.0975	Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.24	10,000
7.5	3.65	Vista Land and Lifescapes Inc.	5.8	5.8	5.6	5.8	1,554,000
		MEDIA					
38.5	18.75	ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	33	33	33	33	13,000
12	7.6	GMA Holdings Inc.	8	8	7.9	8	3,476,000
11.75	7.5	GMA Network Inc.	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.7	615,000
		TELECOMMUNICATIONS					
2.12	1.1	Digital Telecommunications Phils. Inc.	1.62	1.66	1.6	1.64	8,160,000
1,750.00	1,180.00	Globe Telecom Inc.	1,485.00	1,515.00	1,485.00	1,510.00	59,600
3,285.00	2,250.00	Phil. Long Distance Telephone Co.	3,020.00	3,040.00	3,020.00	3,030.00	101,710
8.1	5.5	Pilipino Telephone Corp.	7.1	7.3	7.1	7.3	5,952,000
		INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY					
0.39	0.17	Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	400,000
16.5	2.1	Diversified Financial Network Inc.	15.25	15.25	14.75	15	466,300
11.5	3.55	IPVG Corp.	7.3	7.3	7.1	7.3	338,000
0.065	0.027	ISM Communications Corp.	0.036	0.037	0.036	0.036	23,600,000
5	1.62	Information Capital Tech. Ventures Inc.	3	3	3	3	12,000
2.9	1.1	Ionics Inc.	1.42	1.42	1.42	1.42	200,000
0.32	0.05	Island Information and Technology Inc.	0.17	0.17	0.165	0.165	2,510,000
2.26	1.1	Music Semiconductors Corp.	1.9	1.94	1.9	1.94	298,000
0.0725	0.03	Philweb Corp.	0.044	0.045	0.044	0.045	88,800,000
4.7	1.64	Transpacific Broadband Group Int'l. Inc.	2.34	2.42	2.34	2.34	1,485,000
		TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
49	19	Int'l Container Terminal Services Inc.	44	44	43.5	43.5	143,000
2.3	0.93	Keppel Philippines Marine Inc.	2.2	2.22	2.2	2.2	836,000
		HOTEL & LEISURE					
4.25	1.8	Leisure and Resorts World Corp.	2.32	2.36	2.3	2.36	490,000
1.52	0.33	Premiere Entertainment Productions Inc.	1.2	1.24	1.2	1.2	2,331,000
1.2	0.55	Waterfront Philippines Inc.	0.8	0.81	0.8	0.81	100,000
		EDUCATION					
950	650	Far Eastern University Inc.	805	805	805	805	90
3.7	2.6	iPeople Inc.	3.2	3.2	3.15	3.15	117,000
		DIVERSIFIED SERVICES					
6.14	0.94	JTH Davies Holdings Inc.	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.6	29,000
6	2.04	Macroasia Corp.	4.75	4.75	4.7	4.7	102,000
17.25	9.8	Pacific Online Systems Corp.	10.25	10.25	10	10.25	250,100
30	5.3	Paxys Inc.	6	6.2	5.9	6.2	583,000
472.5	350	eTelecare Global Solutions Inc.	380	385	380	385	2,570
		MINING					
0.017	0.0085	Abra Mining and Industrial Corp.	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	28,000,000
7.2	3.6	Apex Mining Co. Inc. "A"	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.9	115,000
7.4	3.85	Apex Mining Co. Inc. "B"	6.2	6.2	6.2	6.2	59,000
21.25	8.1	Atlas Cons. Mining and Dev't Corp.	13.25	13.5	13	13.5	401,000
20.75	8.9	Benguet Corp. "A"	19	19	18.75	18.75	96,800
12.75	2.18	Dizon Copper Silver Mines Inc.	8.4	8.4	8.2	8.3	355,000
3.1	0.6	GEOGRACE Resources Philippines Inc.	1.84	1.86	1.78	1.8	11,912,000
0.56	0.18	Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co. "A"	0.49	0.49	0.46	0.46	11,330,000
0.61	0.22	Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co. "B"	0.5	0.5	0.47	0.48	19,740,000
0.038	0.017	Manila Mining Corp. "A"	0.028	0.028	0.027	0.028	21,100,000
0.041	0.02	Manila Mining Corp. "B"	0.029	0.029	0.029	0.029	53,000,000
30	3.6	NIHAO Minerals Resources Int'l Inc.	19	19.5	18.5	18.75	123,100
0.021	0.01	Omico Corp.	0.013	0.013	0.013	0.013	63,800,000
0.015	0.007	Omico Corp.-Warrants	0.009	0.009	0.009	0.009	24,000,000
3.3	3	Oriental Peninsula Resources Group Inc.	3.2	3.25	3.1	3.25	20,543,000
11.25	3.5	Philex Mining Corp.	9.4	9.4	9.1	9.1	8,694,000
1.76	0.99	Vulcan Industrial and Mining Corp.	1.04	1.08	1.04	1.04	1,098,000
		OIL					
0.58	0.27	Basic Energy Corp.	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	1,980,000
0.029	0.011	Oriental Pet. and Minerals Corp. "A"	0.023	0.023	0.023	0.023	204,000,000
0.03	0.011	Oriental Pet. and Minerals Corp. "B"	0.024	0.025	0.024	0.025	7,200,000
13.75	9	Petroenergy Resources Corp.	10	10	10	10	40,000
0.032	0.0098	The Philodrill Corp.	0.028	0.029	0.028	0.029	31,700,000

AVERAGES			VOLUME	VALUE
Financial	856.93 UP	11.41	17,631,680	770,063,710.00
Industrial	4,446.30 UP	32.20	47,901,100	465,911,925.00
Holding Firms	1,927.96 UP	38.49	12,302,973,070	461,232,385.00
Property	1,494.88 UP	27.53	92,618,400	377,434,630.00
Service	1,821.15 UP	9.51	137,982,370	498,811,975.00
Mining & Oil	7,952.34 DOWN	180.90	485,286,900	206,423,565.00
All Shares Index	2,176.74 UP	26.53		
PSEI	3,532.98 UP	41.02		
		GRAND TOTALS	13,084,393,520	2,779,878,190.00

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SOURCE: TECHNISTOCK, PSE

GMA Network, IPVG forge gaming joint venture

By Riza T. Olchondra

ONLINE GAMES JUST GOT better. Subsidiaries of GMA Network Inc. and listed IT company IPVG Corp. will be forming a joint venture company that will engage in the online gaming business starting next year.

In separate disclosures to the Philippine Stock Exchange on Thursday, the parent companies of the companies said that the joint venture firm would be incorporated under the name I-Play Inc.

The company will design, operate and maintain online gaming and related portals.

GMA New Media Inc. (GMA-NMI) and IP E-Game Ventures Inc., a unit of IPVG, have signed a shareholders agreement to create the new company.

Each party will have a 50-percent stake in I-Play.

The joint venture company will have an authorized capital stock of P800 million and an initial paid-in capital of P200 million.

It will start operations in the first quarter of 2008.

GMA-NMI is a wholly owned subsidiary of GMA Network and is in the business of operating, developing, distributing, selling and exporting various audio, visual and Internet content products.

IP E-Game operates the online gaming business unit of IPVG.

IP E-Game Ventures has MMORPGs such as Granado Espada and other games such as Audition Dance Battle in its repertoire.

IP E-Game COO Steve Tsao said in an interview during the launch of Audition that online gaming markets in Asia, including the Philippines, were expected to mature in a few years' time.

And once that happens, they will likely turn to "casual" or more simple online games despite the continued popularity of massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG), which started the whole online gaming buzz.

More than 200 million people worldwide play casual games via the Internet.

According to the Casual Games Association and DFC Intelligence 2006 Market Report, the "casual" games industry is expected to reach $1.5 billion in 2008.

While that is just a fraction of the huge $30 billion market of MMORPGs, IP E-Game believes that in the very near future, more people will play more simple online games, with explosive growth in emerging countries such as the Philippines.

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Cubao (via LRT)	4.83km
Ateneo de Manila (via LRT)	7.60km
Makati (via LRT)	11.55km

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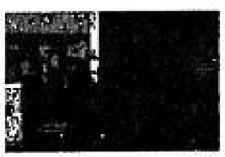
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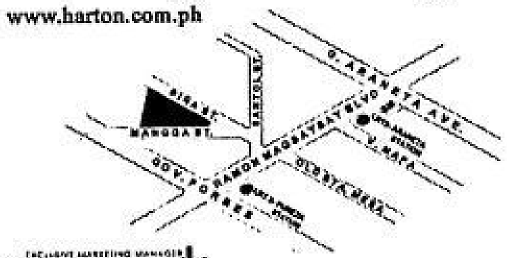

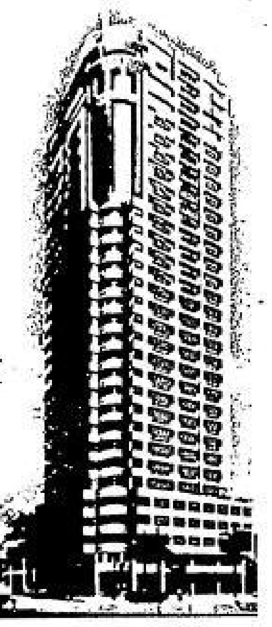

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Gov't sees lower 91-day T-bill rate in '08

Bellwether debt paper rates to range from 3.5% to 4.5%

By Michelle V. Remo

THE GOVERNMENT EXPECTS interest rates to remain low next year as it anticipates a balanced budget after 10 years of posting deficits.

Augusto Santos, acting director general of the National Economic and Development Authority, said the 2008 fiscal program of the government assumes the bellwether 91-day Treasury bill rate to hit an average of 3.5 to 4.5 percent.

This is lower than the 4- to 4.5-percent target for this year.

The government adopted a lower interest rate assumption for next year after it noted this year's benign interest rate environment. The 91-day T-bill rate, for instance, averaged at 3.4 percent in January to November—it did not even reach the lower end of the assumption for 2007.

This was despite the US subprime market crisis, which has resulted in risk aversion even against emerging economies like the Philippines.

Finance officials earlier said, however, that effects of the US subprime market woes on domestic interest rates was minimal and short-lived. They said the average interest rates could have been lower without the subprime factor.

For next year, the government aims to post a balanced budget and lift the country's credit image abroad. The government has expressed confidence it would attain its target, seeing that the country has now topped its fiscal goal for 2007.

The government targeted to improve its budget position this year by posting a deficit of only P63 billion—lower than last year's P64.8 billion. But in January to November, the government already posted a budget surplus of P12.6 billion.

This prompted speculations that the government could balance its budget in 2007, or a year ahead of schedule.

GASSING UP FOR COLLEGE
Edgar Chua of Pilipinas Shell shakes the hand of Marieto Garvida, Public Transport Workers Foundation president, during the launching of the "Gas Mo, Bukas Ko II" program for the transport sector. Under the program, scholarship grants will be given to deserving children of public utility drivers and operators. INQUIRER PHOTO/ROMY HOMILLADA

House committee to investigate Zed's operations

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IS SET to investigate Zed Philippines Inc., a Spanish firm that has been operating in the Philippines for several years.

The firm is reported to be operating without a license from the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC).

Representatives Florencio G. Noel and Justin Marc SB Chipeco have filed a resolution urging the House committee on information and communication technology to "immediately initiate an inquiry in aid of legislation as to how and why Zed Philippines Inc. continues to operate ... despite its failure and/or refusal to register," as required by the NTC

The firm allegedly has been providing value-added services (VAS) to cell phone users in the Philippines, such as ring tones, wallpapers and other offerings under the names of "powlove," "powtone," and "clubz," among other products, according to the resolution.

Zed Philippines also generated hundreds of millions of pesos over the years, based on financial statements the firm submitted to the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

In the resolution, the lawmakers cited an NTC memorandum order, which provided that "entities intending to provide value-added services only shall submit to the Commission applications for registration for approval."

"Zed's continued operation as an unregistered VAS provider in the Philippines excludes it from the regulatory authority of the NTC ... [it] not only poses unfair competition to legitimate, registered VAS providers but could have a negative long-term impact on the domestic telecommunications market as well," the resolution added.

The resolution was apparently prompted by the second complaint filed with the NTC on Dec. 14 by David Michael Amparo, a former Zed subscriber.

Amparo reiterated his appeal for the telecommunications regulator to issue a cease-and-desist order to Zed in the wake of published reports that its mother company in Spain, La Netro Zed, planned to make the Philippines its regional headquarters in Southeast Asia.

NFA opens bidding for 450,000 MT of long grain rice

By Amy R. Remo

AT LEAST 12 SUPPLIERS JOINED THE bidding yesterday for the contracts to supply a combined 450,000 metric tons of long grain white rice offered by the National Food Authority.

The latest volume brings total rice imports this year to 2.3 million metric tons.

According to NFA public affairs director Rex Estoperez, the additional volume was intended to boost buffer rice stocks, following the prolonged dry spell that had adversely affected the country's rice producing regions.

Offers ranged between $399.98 and $484 a metric ton.

The NFA is set to decide which companies would be awarded contracts within a week.

The bidding, which followed strict requirements under Republic Act 9184, was observed by various representatives from government agencies, like the Commission on Audit and the Philippine International Trading Center, as well as representatives of organizations of farmers, retailers and consumers.

Bidding for the contracts were LG International, Angiang Tourimex, Angimex, KTC, Olam International, VinaFood, Kramer Agri Multicom, Louis Dreyfus, Daewoo International, Thai Hua, Asia Golden Rice and Toeffer International, which were expected to bring in rice from Thailand, Vietnam and Pakistan.

LG International offered to bring in 20,000 MT rice from Thailand at $420 a metric ton.

Louis Dreyfus, meanwhile, said it could bring in 30,000 MT of rice from Thailand and Vietnam for $399.98 a metric ton.

The new rice stocks are expected to arrive within the first quarter of next year.

Starting last September, NFA has increased by half the volume of government rice it distributes in Metro Manila and Regions 3 and 4 to prevent unwarranted increases in rice prices.

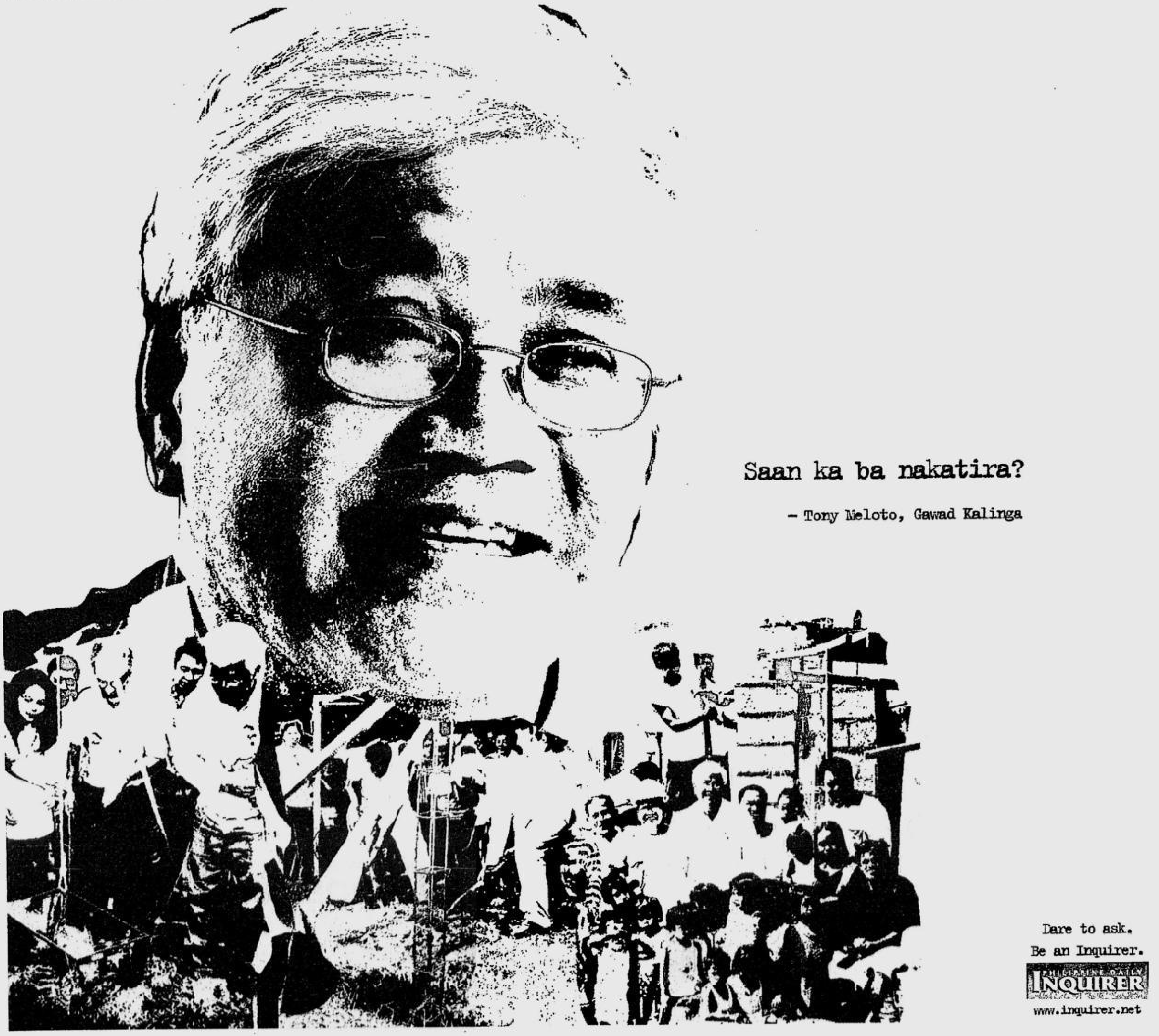
According to NFA, the average daily volume distributed to the National Capital Region is around 30,000 bags (50 kg) while Region 3 has an allocation of 25,000 bags and Region 4, 15,000 bags.

Total additional volume would be 35,000 bags a day.

This brings total average daily allocation for the three regions to 105,000 bags.

This move is part of the agency's effort to forestall increases in rice prices.

Government rice is sold at P18 a kilo through government outlets, including the Tindahan Natin, Bigasang Bayan and accredited private retail outlets.


Saan ka ba nakatira?
– Tony Meloto, Gawad Kalinga
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10-mo VAT collection hits ₱121.2B

Rate increase slower than economic growth

By Michelle V. Remo

THE VALUE-ADDED TAX COLLECTION of the Bureau of Internal Revenue registered a 4-percent rise in January to October to P121.17 billion from P116.37 billion a year ago.

This was attributed to the expansion of the economy during the period.

The 12-percent VAT is imposed on gross sales revenues.

In October, VAT collection posted a 4-percent decline to P11.4 billion from P11.92 billion in the same month last year.

Finance officials said the decline in October and the moderate increase recorded in the first 10 months indicated that there was still room for the BIR to improve its tax collection efficiency.

The economy grew 7.1 percent in the first three quarters of the year, triggering optimism that this year's official growth target of between 6.1 percent and 6.7 percent for the full year would be exceeded.

Tax collection should be growing at a rate commensurate with the economy's growth given an efficient tax collecting agency.

But revenue officials said the growth of the economy was not the sole factor affecting tax collection, especially VAT. They said one reason for weaker-than-expected tax collection was the low inflation environment.

The BIR is tasked to collect P765.9 billion for the full year, but it has admitted that the goal was no longer attainable.

Its total collection in the first 10 months of the year reached P521.9 billion, short of its target for the period by P54 billion.

The BIR's target for the year used various macroeconomic assumptions, one of which is that inflation would average between 4 percent and 5 percent this year. However, actual inflation averaged only 2.6 percent during the period.

VAT collection, according to revenue officials, was dragged down by the slower rise in consumer prices.

The BIR, according to the Department of Finance, was directed to intensify measures aimed at shoring up revenue collection.

The DOF said the government wanted to enhance efficiency in tax collection and to lessen its dependence on privatization revenues.

The BIR is the government's biggest revenue earner among line agencies, accounting for about 60 percent of the total collection.

Despite its expected failure to meet the full-year target, the government is seen meeting its goal of limiting the budget deficit to P63 billion this year. Privatization revenues for the year were more than enough to compensate for the BIR's shortfall.

The government raised P90 billion in January to November from the sale of state-owned assets, including stakes in PNOC-Energy Development Corp. and Philippine Telecommunications Investments Corp.

FOOD SUPPLY, PRICE MONITORING
Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap talks to a consumer at the Maypajo Market in Caloocan City where a series of "palengke" visits kicked-off as part of the Department of Agriculture's effort to monitor the prices and supply of basic food products. Yap also led the ceremonial ribbon cutting that opened the "bagsakan" center at the market to make food available and within reach of low-income families.

Meat processors to sell in barangay food terminals

By Amy R. Remo

LEADERS OF THE LOCAL MEAT PROCESSING industry are set to sell their products in barangay food terminals in Metro Manila, allowing consumers to buy processed meat items at lower prices.

"We are glad that big meat processors have committed, as they have done so for the last several years now, to make holiday food items affordable for our consumers this Christmas season," Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap said.

BFTs are terminals where consumers can buy food such as rice, meat and vegetables at prices about 12 percent cheaper than their regular retail prices.

Members of the Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. (Pampi), which include big corporate players like San Miguel Foods, Purefoods and RFM-Swift, have likewise assured the DA to keep prices of ham, bacon, hotdogs and other processed meat products stable during the holidays.

Pampi executive director Francisco Buencamino said prices of hams, bacons, corned beef and hotdogs had not significantly increased over the last four years, adding that this year would not be any different.

For the holidays, the cheapest hams in the market are the pear-shaped ones, selling for less than P200 for a one-kilo piece.

According to Buencamino, prices had remained within this level in the past two years, as Pampi had committed to Yap that they will keep prices of their products at a steady level, as what they have been doing for the last four years.

PPA seeks ₱10-B loan from Spain for projects

By Riza T. Olchondra

THE PHILIPPINE PORTS AUTHORITY (PPA) is expecting to get a P10-billion loan from Spain for its plan to put up solar-powered modular ports nationwide.

PPA general manager Oscar Sevilla said the Banco de Bilbao in Madrid, Spain had agreed to extend the loan.

He said PPA was hoping to get the loan at 2.2 percent interest, payable in 10 to 15 years with a grace period of five years.

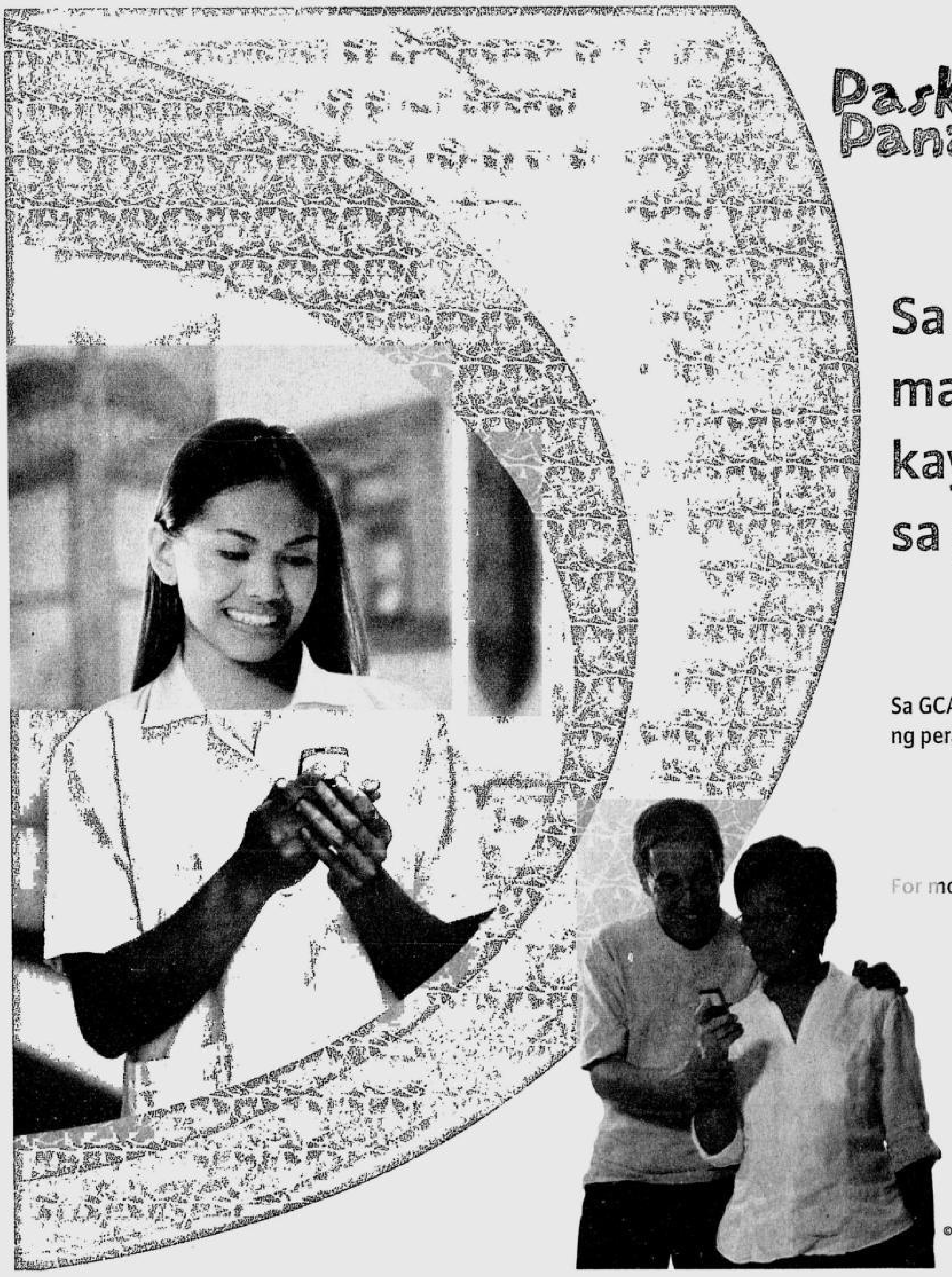
"The objective (of the project) is to link the islands of the country with modular ports. It takes only two to three years to put a modular port and is cheaper than the regular port," he said.

Sevilla said traditional ports cost about P150 million while modular ports cost P45 million to P50 million.

"A modular port is mostly made of steel. The technology for it was developed in Spain. Russia was said to be the first to acquire a modular port from Spain and we could be the second,"

He said modular ports offered added environmental benefits as these were powered by energy from the sun, which is always available and does not cause pollution.

Sevilla said there were 70 to 100 candidate locations where the modular ports could be put up. He did not set a target for the project, saying that it would depend on when the Department of Finance would close the loan deal with Spain.



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Perfect comfort food with Jollibee Express Delivery

BEING STRANDED ON A RAINY night somewhere away from home or stuck in the office beating deadlines makes people feel frustrated. At times like these, people seek the reward of hot and fresh comfort food to while the time and give much-needed boosts of energy. Comfort food bestsellers from Jollibee bring cheer for those times when a hot meal is out of reach, bringing the best solution for those blues.

Jollibee, with its Langhap Sarap Goodness, has a complete lineup of great food that comforts and satisfies, and with the Express Delivery service, Filipinos can instantly have Chickenjoy, Yumburger, Jollibee Spaghetti or Molo Meatball Soup for a hot delicious meal during rainy days, or even enjoy Jolly 'Zerts like the new Caramel Pastillas Sundae, Ice Craze, and Jolly Frost Blends to ease office worries. Just dial 8-7000, place the orders, and wait excitedly for the delivery to arrive right on time.

Even if work requires employees to be always on the go, the Express Delivery service will always be there to comfort, come rain or shine, 24 hours daily. With Jollibee's dedication to continually improve its delivery service, enjoying food that is hot, fresh, and delicious anytime, anywhere is as easy as A-B-C.

So for sudden cravings, for something to energize groups to get the projects going or to celebrate for a job well done, just dial 8-7000. to enjoy Jollibee's extensive menu of tasty Filipino food-fast and complete! With the Express Delivery Service, comforting and delicious food is just a phone call away!

Mitsubishi, BPI tie up for 'Balik Bayani' auto program

BALIK-BAYANI AUTO PROGRAM
act signing: Oct 11, 2
BPI
Pinoy
MITSUBISHI MOTORS

MITSUBISHI MOTORS PHILIPPINES and BPI Direct Savings Bank recently inked an agreement for Mitsubishi-BPI Direct Balik Bayani Auto program. Under this program, Filipino workers or migrants abroad can purchase a brand new Mitsubishi vehicle which will be used by their immediate family or relative in the Philippines. These vehicles will be financed by BPI Direct and the payments for the monthly amortizations can be made via cash remittances through BPI remittance centers worldwide.

Taizo Furuhashi, MMPC's EVP for marketing, stated that, "We welcome this partnership with BPI, as they are currently the market leader in overseas remittances from Filipino workers abroad. We expect that this Mitsubishi Motors-BPI Direct Balik Bayani auto program will be well received by Filipinos working in the Middle East, Europe, United States, and Asia. Now it will be a lot easier to invest on a Mitsubishi vehicle which will be entrusted to their immediate families or relatives here in the Philippines, whether it will be used as a private vehicle or for business".

Meantime, BPI Direct president Raul Dimayuga said, "Mitsubishi vehicles such as the Adventure, L300FB, Strada and even the Fuzion will definitely appeal to most of our Kababayans abroad considering that these vehicles are affordable and at the same time have low running cost. Our BPI remittance centers around the world are more than ready to service the remittance needs of Mitsubishi buyers."

Present during the Oct. 11 contract signing were: (from left) Raul D. Dimayuga, BPI Direct president, Teresita B. Tan, SVP overseas banking and service group of BPI, Taizo Furuhashi, EVP marketing division of MMPC, and Melchor R. Dizon, SVP marketing division of MMPC.

Ecodriving with Kia's new E-Car

THE WORLD'S TURNING GREEN. Or at the very least, it's trying to think green, act green and look green. With fuel prices close to $100 a barrel, shortened mall hours despite the 'Ber months, and the government persuading everyone to cut down on power consumption, there is absolutely every reason to go "green".

Vehicle owners are especially driven to do their share of ecodriving. European drivers and energy companies have banded together to promote an "Ecodriven" lifestyle. Here are a few ecodriving tips:

- Sloooow down. Although there is a certain kind of "rush" when driving at high speed, it can also literally be a drag. Tests show that the faster you drive, the greater the aerodynamic drag. This drag decreases a car's fuel efficiency and produces higher fuel emissions.
- Drive smoothly. Avoid hard braking, abrupt acceleration and cornering. These unnecessary usage wear out the engine, brakes, tires and transmission and wastes fuel.
- Keep your vehicle in tiptop condition. Have your car checked regularly for any problems that may affect its fuel efficiency. Watch out for black exhaust, or in some cases white exhaust which means the engine has a lean mixture of fuel for combustion, dashboard warning signals and air conditioning leaks or problems.
- Bag-check. Don't weigh down your vehicle. Overloading increases drag and puts too much strain on the car even if it is a widely acclaimed workhorse. Part of the car's engine power goes to overcoming aerodynamic drag. Adding excess weight or even overhead cargo and bag carriers have a direct effect on fuel efficiency.'
- Consider a newer, more ecofriendly car on your next purchase. New car models run more kilometers on less fuel, and produce less pollutant. They are also likely to have better fuel-efficiency ratings. Some newer models can even run on flexible fuels or a choice between gasoline and biofuel. One of these is the Kia Picanto.

Kia, one of the fastest growing automobile manufacturers in the world, has set its sights on "green-driving" with its new E-Car-the Picanto. The Picanto line previously made waves before with its sleek European design and styling and no-nonsense handling. This time though, the Picanto has become both a delight to drivers and environmentalists alike because of its "ecodriven" platform.

The Picanto E-Car is a stylish, compact car that delivers a punch in terms of performance and handling. With its fuel-efficient 1.1. liter, SOHC, 4 cylinders, 12-valve, multipoint fuel injection engine, the E-Car can run 20.8 km per liter (after the 2006 Department of Energy Econorun). The ecofriendly E-Car delivers a best-in-class 64 PS at 5,500 rpm and 9.8 kg/m of torque at 2,800 rpm.

Kia's new Picanto E-car is easy on the eyes. New headlights and tail lights, powerful fog lamps, an elegant front grille, sleek front and rear bumpers, amber-lighted instrument panel, extended front and rear legroom and a longer overall length add more flair to the car's feel and over-all look.

Aside from its outstanding performance, efficient fuel burn, low auto emissions, the Picanto E-Car is also built to run on gasoline mixed with ethanol (up to 10-percent blend). Other countries such as Brazil, the United States, Germany, Sweden, France and Spain use ethanol or bioethanol as a fuel alternative for vehicles.

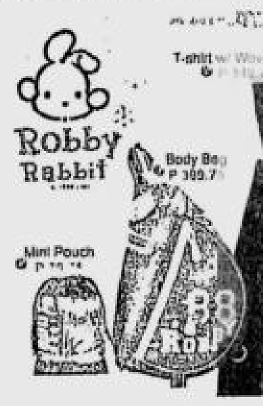
Alternative fuel, specifically ethanol, has also gained a foothold in the country. E10 popularly known as gasohol, is the most widely used and produced biofuel in the Philippines. E10 is priced approximately P10 cheaper than other fuel, has a high octane rating, less fuel emissions, high volumetric efficiency and power, and more environment friendly than other fuel.

The Picanto E-Car powertrain is ethanol-ready proving that it is energy efficient, environment friendly, and at par with today's "green living" standards. The E-Car's concept and design are kilometers ahead of its competition which attests that Kia indeed has the power to surprise.

Christmas gifts for the young ones

CHRISTMAS WON'T BE COMPLETE without gifts. However they are wrapped and designed, gifts certainly delight recipients, especially the young ones. There is always this feeling of elation that every time they receive some Christmas presents, they feel appreciated, remembered, and loved.

Over the years, Characters Unlimited, one of the leading character chain shops in the country, has continued to strengthen the "spirit of gift-giving" by providing fashionista parents the opportunity for "smart buying" to fill in their children's Holiday wish list. The cute and adorable character Robby Rabbit, one of its product brands which now enjoys a kind of popularity not only for the young ones but also for the young at heart, has made its share of bringing life and color to children. In fact, Robby Rabbit has now become part of every child's lifestyle.



With its trendy, chic design and quality, there is nothing like purchasing the best of Robby Rabbit products as gifts for the Yuletide season. One can choose from among its new line of bags, boys' and girls' apparel, infants' wears and other children's items. Robby Rabbit products also include novelty items, lunch boxes, tumblers, caps, towels, pillows, stationery and other collectibles.

Robby Rabbit products never run out of style as they come in different choices created with quality at reasonable prices. "We capitalize on quality and updated designs because we believe in giving 'value for money' to our customers," shares Irene L. Ching, vice president of Characters Unlimited chain of retail stores. "We would like to maintain Robby Rabbit's tradition of quality and excellence which our customers truly deserve."

Registered in the US National Library of Congress in early 1988, this little white rabbit, originally sketched by Carol Ching in 1987, has come a long way as it continues to thrive as one of the most popular Filipino-created cartoon characters in town. Today, Robby Rabbit continues to conquer the local retail market through Characters Unlimited stores, SM Department Stores and other leading department stores nationwide.

So, put a smile on your children's faces by giving them a perfect Holiday gift from Robby Rabbit. You will surely fill in your children's Christmas wish list with a "smart deal" this year.

Robby Rabbit products are now up for grabs at all leading department stores nationwide and Characters Unlimited branches at Tutuban Centermall, Manila; Festival Supermall Alabang; Riverbanks Mall Marikina; Magic Star Mall Tarlac and the wholesale outlet at 545 Juan Luna Street, Binondo, Manila (241-7744, 243-2738).

San Miguel's premium present for coffee lovers

SAN MIGUEL SUPER COFFEEMIX offers this holiday season the Grandeur Flavor Collection, a special product pack ideal for coffee drinkers who go for the flavored brew.

Grandeur, which comes in Original, HazelNut, Mocha and Italian Original flavors, is a sugar-free 3-in-1 instant coffee blend made from the finest Colombian Arabica coffee beans. It has 45-percent less calories than regular coffee mixes yet contains the satisfying taste of premium grade coffee.

The Grandeur Flavor Collection contains all four flavors packed in an attractive pull-out box, making it a splendid gift for family and friends with various personalities.

The well-balanced taste and smooth finish of Grandeur Original is perfect for simple, no-nonsense coffee drinkers. Grandeur Mocha's creamy, chocolaty flavor is for the sentimental romantic while Grandeur Hazelnut, with its exotic aroma and nutty flavor, fits well individuals who love the arts. The Grandeur Italian Original makes a delightful companion for the serious type who prefers the deep aroma and full-bodied taste of authentic Italian coffee.

The Grandeur Flavor Collection is available in all leading supermarkets and groceries nationwide.

Party in style with Cravings holiday packages

CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN style with Cravings' Special Christmas Party Packages—an assorted list of sumptuous dishes specially created with the holiday theme in mind.

The Christmas Function and Catering Package include three set menus good for a group of 30 to a hundred, featuring a tantalizing selection of chef's specialties that are priced reasonably (P500 to P700 per head). These dishes include some of Cravings classics which have graced the menu such as Steak & Bacon Tournedos, Pot Roast a la New Orleans, Zucchini & Onion Sauté, Rice Pilaf, Chicken Galantine, Carbonara ala Primavera, Lengua con Champignon, Coconut Prawns in Mango Sauce, Spaghetti Amattriciana, Baked Three Cheese Chicken, among others.

Dessert choices are equally superb since the restaurant is also known for satisfying the craving of a sweet tooth: Chocolate Eclairs and Mini Cream Puffs, Devil's Food Cake and Chocolate Caramel Squares, or L'Opera Bars & Black Forest Squares and an array of cakes that will surely delight the senses.

Visit Cravings at Katipunan Avenue, Quezon City; Shangri-La Mall; Fraser Place Serviced Residence, Makati; Festival Mall, Tomas Morato and West Avenue in Quezon City. For more inquiries, call 689-1111, or log on to www.cravings-group.com.

Study to migrate to Australia

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION Specialists has been placing students from the Philippines to Australia since 1986. Many students who study in Australia love the people and the country and want to use their educational qualifications to start a career there. Now they can.

Changes in the immigration laws in Australia have opened up a whole new range of opportunities for students and for professionals who want to live and work there. The Study to Migrate seminar is aimed at anybody aged between 17 to 35 who wants to study, then work or migrate in Australia. As well as education expert Roger Bartholomew, who will be discussing courses and educational institutions in Australia and the different types of student visas, David Stephens, Principal of Australasian Immigration Services, will be presenting the many options for working and living in Australia.

AIS' services involve quick and effective forward planning for visa applications, expert advice on all areas of the migration process, firm control of a visa application and efficient dealing with all the Australian government and authority officials who make crucial decisions during the visa application process. With the head office centrally located in Sydney, Australia's premier city, AIS also has associates throughout Asia and the Middle East as well as numerous affiliations with other specialist firms including translators, English teachers, educational institutions, registered training organizations, middle and upper level employment consultancies, skills assessing authorities and community and settlement groups within Australia.

The free seminar on "Study to Migrate" will be held at the AIM Acceed Conference Center, opposite Greenbelt 1 in Makati, on Jan 8, 2008 at 6 p.m. All participants are required to register in advance, which can be done by phone (819-1001), or text 0928-2708527 or through the registration form on the Inter-Ed web site (www.inter-ed.com).

'THE ILOCOS HERITAGE' FEATURED IN HAWAII

On a recent visit to Honolulu, Hawaii, 'The Ilocos Heritage' by Visitacion 'Chit' R. dela Torre, one of the country's book authors, was featured in mini book launches. Shown are Dela Torre (right, front), Johnny delos Santos (right), Maggie Domingo and Dr. Myrna Rosel. 'The Ilocos Heritage' is available at National Book Store and other outlets, or call 815-4938, 815-6925 or e-mail chitdelatorre@yahoo.com.

QUEZON I ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

Poctol, Pitogo, Quezon

INVITATION TO PRE-QUALIFICATION AND TO BID

QUEZELCO I is inviting interested suppliers to apply for qualification and to bid for the supply of attached CARE FUNDED PROJECTS materials.

a. PROJECT ID - 1A - Replacement of Rotten Poles (BACKBONE LINES)
b. PROJECT ID - 3 - Rehabilitation of Octopus Connection
c. PROJECT ID - 5 - Transformer Management and Power Quality

CARE FUNDED PROJECTS
C.Y. 2007

NO.	Materials Description	Qty.
1	Steel Pole 30', Standard	68
2	Steel Pole 40', Standard	80
3	Pin Type Insulator (ANSI CLASS 55-5)	215
4	Suspension Insulator, 6" clevis type	80
5	Pole Top Pin, 20"	150
6	Pin crossarm steel, 5/8"x10-3/4"	120
7	Pin crossarm steel clamp type	120
8	Machine bolt, 1/2"x6"	100
9	Machine bolt, 5/8"x10"	100
10	Machine bolt, 5/8"x8"	204
11	Machine bolt, 5/8"x14"	100
12	Machine bolt, 5/8"x18"	100
13	Single upset bolt, 5/8"x8"	111
14	Double upset bolt, 5/8"x8"	111
15	Double arming bolt, 5/8"x18"	240
16	Double arming bolt, 5/8"x22"	240
17	Oval eye bolt, 5/8"x8"	178
18	Oval eye bolt, 5/8"x10"	240
19	Bolt carriage, 3/8"x4-1/2"	100
20	Bolt thimble eye type straight, 5/8"x12"	120
21	Crossarm, 3-1/2"x4-1/2"x8'-0" (Wood)	180
22	Crossarm, 3-3/4"x4-3/4"x10'-0" (Wood)	180
23	Angle Brace, 2 x 2" x 1/4" 60 Span	150
24	Brace sidearm diagonal, 1-3/4" angle, 3/16"x7'-0"	170
25	Brace sidearm vertical angle, 50"	170
26	Washer, 2-1/4"x2-1/4"x3/16", 3/16" hole	324
27	Washer, 4"x4"x1/2", 3/16" hole	280
28	Washer, round, 1-3/8"dia. 9/16" hole	100
29	Screw lag, 1/2"x4"	150
30	Spool insulator, 1-3/4" dia. groove	304
31	Spool insulator, 3" dia. groove	150
32	Insulated Bracket	224
33	Suspension clamp, Al. Alloy Clevis, 2 Bolts #2/0 ACSR Max.	100
34	Clevis secondary swinging w/o spool	208
35	Shackle anchor, forged steel galvanized	100
36	Deadend Strain clamp, #4 To #4/0 ACSR	100
37	Clamp loop deadend, #6 To #2/0 ACSR	820
38	Hot line clamp, #2-4/0 ACSR Main To #2-4/0	100
39	Clamp guy, 3 bolt, 6" long, Heavy Duty	420
40	Eye Nut, 5/8", Conventional	150
41	Guy wire, S-M, 7-strand (M.)	762
42	Guy hook, J	240
43	Anchor Rod threaded single eye, 5/8 x 7	180
44	Anchor (creosoted log), 8"x5'-0"	153
45	Conductor #2/0 Bare ACSR (M.)	3,000
46	Conductor #2 Bare, ACSR (M.)	5,159
47	Conductor #2 Insulated, ACSR (M.)	5,159
48	Distribution Transformer, 37.5 kVA, SB, w/ Tap Changer	4
49	Distribution Transformer, 25 kVA CSP, w/ Tap Changer	5
50	Distribution Transformer, 15 kVA CSP, w/ Tap Changer	10
51	Distribution Transformer, 10 kVA CSP, w/ Tap Changer	10
52	Distribution Transformer, 5 kVA, CSP, w/ Tap Changer	19
53	Fuse Cutout with lighting arrester CL (AB Chance)	48
54	Fuse Link (Chance)	48
55	30 mm² / #2 AWG THWN/THHN Copper Wire	85
56	60 mm² / #2/0 AWG THWN/THHN Copper Wire	85

Prospective bidders have to submit their updated company profile with latest Audited Financial Statements addressed to Inocencio P. Diguidig BAC Chairman, QUEZELCO I, Brgy. Poctol, Pitogo, Quezon. Financial standing of the suppliers will be evaluated as to the capability to accomplish the said undertaking.

Bid documents will be available only to prospective bidders at the BAC Secretariat upon payment of non-refundable fee of P2,500.

The pre-qualification and bidding activities are as follows:

Activities	Schedule
1. Pre-qualification/Accreditation of suppliers Issuance of Bid-documents	December 26-28, 2007
2. Pre-bid conference	January 4, 2008, 1:00 PM
3. Opening and Evaluation of Bid	January 8, 2008
4. Notice of Award	

(Sgd.) **INOCENCIO P. DIGUIDIG**
BAC Chairman

Noted:
(Sgd.) **ENGR. CARLITO M. RUFO, JR.**
General Manager
(PDI--Dec. 21 & 22, 2007)

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REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
CENTER (PICC)

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

ONE YEAR CONTRACT FOR REGULAR JANITORIAL SANITATION AND CARPET/FABRIC UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE SERVICES

The PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER (PICC), through its Approved Budget for CY 2008 intends to apply the sum of **TWELVE MILLION NINE HUNDRED NINETY ONE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED FORTY NINE PESOS and 12/100 (P12,991,149.12)** being the Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) to payments for the above-mentioned procurement of service. Bids in excess of the ABC shall be automatically rejected at Bid opening.

The PICC now invites sealed bids from eligible Bidders for the abovementioned requirement to be procured.

Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding procedures using non-discretionary pass/fail criteria as specified in the Implementing Rules and Regulations Part A (IRR-A) of the Republic Act No. 9184 (R.A. 9184), otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act. The bidder with the lowest calculated bid (LCB) shall advance to the post-qualification stage in order to finally determine his responsiveness to the technical and financial requirements of the project. The contract shall then be awarded to the Lowest Calculated and Responsive Bidder (LCRB) who was determined as such during the post-qualification procedure.

Interested Bidders may obtain further information from the BAC Secretariat of the PICC and inspect the bidding documents at the address given below anytime during office hours from **January 9 to 17, 2008.**

Prospective bidders are required to download the Invitation to Apply for Eligibility and to Bid from Phil-GEPS website. The BAC will issue hard copies of the bid documents upon payment of a non-refundable fee in the amount of **FIVE THOUSAND PESOS (P5,000.00)**. The method of payment will be in cash. The Bidding Documents shall be received personally by the prospective Bidder or his authorized representative.

The PICC-BAC will hold a Pre-Bid Conference open to all interested parties on **January 18, 2008, 10:00 a.m.** at the Cafeteria Area, PICC, CCP Complex, Pasay City.

Bids and eligibility requirements must be delivered to the address below at or before **10:00 a.m., February 8, 2008.** All Bids must be accompanied by a Bid security in the form of (cash/Manager's/Cashier's Check) in the amount of **P129,911.49** or an equivalent amount equivalent to 1% of the ABC or Surety Bond issued by the GSIS or any of the PICC accredited insurance companies in the amount equivalent to 2.5% of the ABC or **P324,778.73,** callable upon demand. Late Bids shall not be accepted.

Bid opening shall be on **February 8, 2008, 10:00 a.m.** at the Cafeteria Area. Bids will be opened in the presence of the Bidders' representatives who choose to attend.

The PICC-BAC reserves the right to accept or reject any Bid, and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected Bidder or Bidders.

BIDS AND AWARDS COMMITTEE (BAC)
PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER
CCP Complex, Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City 1307
(02) 551-8230 or (632) 551-7920 loc 7855 and 7149
Telefax No. (02) 551-6873
Email add: **BAC1@picc.gov.ph**

(Sgd.) **VICTORIA C. BERCILES**
BAC Chairperson

(PDI – December 22, 2007)

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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Marikina Polytechnic College through its Bids and Awards Committee invites interested Bidder to apply for eligibility and to Bid for the Canteen concessionaire.

The existing College Canteen has a total area of 390.637 sq. meters. The minimum bid is set at P 15,000.00 per month with contract duration of one-year and renewable thereafter subject to both parties' agreement.

The schedule of BAC activities is as follows:

BAC ACTIVITIES	SCHEDULE
1. Receipt from prospective bidders, Letter of Intent (LOI).	Dec. 28, 2007 to Jan. 03, 2008, BAC Secretariat
2. Eligibility check	January 4-5, 2008
3. Issuance of Bid Documents	January 6-12, 2008
4. Pre-Bid Conference	January 13, 2008, TESDP Bldg.
5. Submission and Opening of Bid Documents	January 14, 2008, TESDP Bldg.

All particulars relative to Eligibility Screening, Pre-Bid Conference, Evaluation of Bid, Post-Qualifications and Award of Contract shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of RA 9184 and it's Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).

Bid documents will be available to prospective bidders at the BAC Office at the TESDP Building upon payment of non-refundable amount of FIVE HUNDRED PESOS ONLY (Php 500.00). In order to secure the documents, bidders should present the official receipt issued by the Cashiers to the BAC Secretariat.

MPC assumes no responsibility whatsoever to compensate or indemnify bidders for any expenses incurred in the preparation of their bid documents.

MPC reserves the right to accept BIDS that are considered Most Advantageous to government.

(Sgd.) **GUNDAWAY F. LAURO**
BAC Chairman

(PDI – December 22, 2007)

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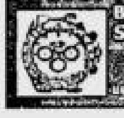

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OBITUARIES

RAMON SIQUIJOR RAMOS

Died in the Grace of our Lord
on December 20, 2007 at the age of 40.

His bereaved wife **MA. ELEANORE;** children **MARC RAMON, KRISTINE, ERIKA, RAMON KRISTOFFER & MONELYSSA;** parents **FRANK & NINI;** brother & sister **MENZI & SANDRA, NINA & BRANDO;** relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at the Premiere Chapel of Christ the King, Green Meadows, Quezon City.

Cremation will be announced later.

OBITUARIES

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you." John 14:1-2

CARLO MIGUEL "MIGS" CEPEDA SISON

February 19, 1977 – December 22, 2002

We sadly remember the 5th death anniversary of "Migs." We would also like to request those whose lives he has touched, to join us in thanking the Lord for his life, reminiscing fond and cherished memories of him.

Bobby and **Marile**
Paolo and **Pauline, Giulio, Emilio**
Robi and **Angeli, Marek, Enzo, Ruiz**
Gov. Nancy Q. Sison (grandmother)
Sison & Cepeda families

RET. BRIG. GEN. RAFAEL F. DUMLAO

Died in the grace of our Lord on Dec. 19, 2007 at the age of 89.

His body lies in state at #127 Executive Village Mangan Vaca, Subic, Zambales.

Cremation will be tomorrow, Dec. 23, 2007, 9:00 AM at the Eternal Garden, Baesa, Caloocan City.

OBITUARY REQUIREMENTS:
➊ Copy of Death Certificate ➋ Any identification document (I.D.)

Engr. Romulo Gasmen Dela Cruz

Died in the Grace of our Lord on December 19, 2007 at the age of 67.

He is preceded in death by his children Carlo & Myra Dela Cruz, Raymond & Mildred Dela Cruz, Roderick Dela Cruz & Jona and beloved grandchildren, Francis Neiman, Janeea Myles and Carlene Mae Dela Cruz.

His body lies in state at St. Peter Memorial Homes, 296 Quezon Ave., Quezon City.

Interment will be on December 23, 2007, 8:00 a.m. at Manila Memorial Park, Sucat Parañaque.

Crush pneumococcal disease the Asap way

Text and photo by Emman Cena

BRAVO: "The fight to save children from PD is not too far a dream. Pneumococcal disease is preventable by vaccination."

EVERY MINUTE, TWO children die of pneumococcal diseases (also called PDs) worldwide. These diseases include bacteremia, sepsis, meningitis, pneumonia, acute otitis media and sinusitis.

In the Asia-Pacific region alone, 98 children under 5 years old die from pneumonia every hour.

These tragic deaths resulting from PDs have brought enormous impact because the awareness of the disease and its associated burden remain low. Likewise, the pneumococcal disease is not a notifiable one and there is no standardized surveillance system among countries.

But the chronic disease will not stop unless collective efforts of doctors, country leaders and parent groups are done worldwide. This was the message sent across in the first pneumococcal vaccination symposium held in Seoul, South Korea last week.

Vaccine preventable

"Although the disease is vaccine-preventable, the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV-7) is not included in the national immunization program of many countries, like the Philippines," says Dr. Lulu Bravo, chair of the Asian Strategic Alliance for Pneumococcal Disease Prevention (Asap), a newly formed organization of experts from international organizations whose task is to focus resources on PDs in the Asia Pacific and the disease's prevention.

Asap, launched on Dec. 14 at the symposium organized by the International Vaccine Institute, is the first and only grouping of its kind in the region. Like the popular usage of "Asap" to mean "as soon as possible," the group wants to impart that immediate action needs to be taken to prevent PD and save lives.

"The fight to save children from PD is not too far a dream. We want to tell everyone that this situation is avoidable—pneumococcal disease is preventable by vaccination. We call to action to raise the level of awareness of PD, facilitate the exchange of information and insights on the disease, propose solutions and push for more preventive measures to be taken," Bravo adds.

To date, Prevenar (PCV7) from Wyeth Vaccines is the only vaccine available on the market and covers seven serotypes (4, 6B, 9V, 14, 18C, 19F and 23F) of the bacterium Streptococcus pneumoniae, also known as pneumococcus (For shot/dosages, consult your family physicians and pediatricians).

Since the licensure of PCV7, it has been launched in 90 countries worldwide, including the Philippines and over 170 million doses have been distributed. It is the first and only vaccine to prevent invasive pneumococcal disease in infants and children younger than 24 months. It also helps protect older children up to 9 years.

Millennium dev't goal

According to health experts and Asap, the fight against pneumococcal disease is the key to achieving the fourth Millennium Development Goal: a two-thirds reduction in child deaths under 5 years of age by 2015.

"We will closely look and find ways to prioritize PD vaccines and hopefully include it in our own national immunization program. We also hope that all sectors—parent groups, doctors and the country's legislative pay attention and draft laws to fully attain the goal of cutting the death by 2015," Dr. Remegio Olveda of the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine says.

"Around P1.6 billion will be needed to implement the program," adds Olveda, who was also the representative of the Department of Health in the Asia-Pacific symposium.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization has identified the inclusion of PCV-7 in national immunization programs as a priority, particularly in countries where the mortality rate of children under 5 years old is greater than 50 per 1,000 live births, or where more than 50,000 die annually.

Many health authorities have already recognized the importance of protecting infants and young children against PDs. The PCV-7 is available in 76 countries (as of January 2007) and is part of the routine national childhood immunization schedule in 17 countries worldwide. Currently in Asia Pacific, only Australia and New Zealand have included the PCV-7 as part of its national immunization program.

In the region, South Korea has the highest rate of birth cohort penetration with 78 percent of newly born children being vaccinated through the private market. Hong Kong has the next highest with 41 percent, followed by Singapore at 36 percent and Taiwan at 24 percent of cohort penetration.

For the record, Asap is affiliated to the global Pneumococcal Awareness Council of Experts (PACE) and the Asian Society of Padiatric Infectious Diseases (Aspid). It also collaborates with other public health and pediatric groups to achieve its mission of containing and controlling pneumococcal disease in Asia Pacific through awareness, surveillance, advocacy and prevention.

Christmas puzzles

EUREKA!

Queena N. Lee-Chua

IT IS CHRISTMAS PUZZLE TIME AGAIN! Puzzles are not only educational, but entertaining as well.

As a Yuletide gift, let me give you three of my favorite math and science puzzles. Let us start with an easy one.

The colored socks

Mario has 25 socks in a drawer, six each of brown, black, white and green. All the socks are alike except for color. How many socks must Mario take out of the drawer, without looking, to be sure of having a matched pair (of any color)?

The solution here is quite simple. Mario needs to take out five socks (one more than the number of different colors) to be sure of getting matched pair.

The missing peso

Three teens went to a fast-food restaurant and got a bill of P30. They paid P10 each. The waiter discovered that by mistake he had overcharged them by P5. But the waiter was not honest, so he decided to keep P2 and return P1 to each of the three teenagers. Each teen thus actually paid only P9 apiece, or a total of P27 for the meal. Add to that the P2 the waiter kept and the total is P29. Where did the missing peso go?

I am sure many of you already know the answer to this conundrum. The cost of the meal was P27 minus P2, or P25. The error comes from mistakenly adding P27 and P2 and getting the misleading sum of P29.

The cold floor

Last night Ana could not sleep. She decided to go to the bathroom. She stepped, barefoot, from her carpeted bedroom into the tiled bathroom and found that the floor was very cold. The door between the bedroom and the bathroom had been open all the time. So why was the bathroom floor so much colder than the bedroom?

Okay, all of us know that the bathroom is tiled. But what does this have to do with heat or cold? The two floors were probably at the same temperature. But carpet is a poorer conductor of heat than tiles. Since the tiles were taking heat from Ana's feet faster, the tiling felt colder than the carpet.

Brainteasers

Now it's your turn. Below are five brainteasers to test your powers of creativity, logic and understanding of the world.

Let us start with a warm-up problem. The best way to answer this is to think outside the box. When does losing something make us happier?

Problem 1. The person who has this is worried. The one who loses this becomes poorer. The person who wins this no longer has it. What is this?

Now for a little counting. Combinatorics is a field of math where we count the number of ways an event can happen, such as the following problem:

Problem 2. A store sells 11 different flavors of ice cream. In how many ways can Juan choose six ice cream cones, not necessarily of different flavors?

Algebra simply means balancing, where the expression on the left side of the equation equals that on the right side. Use a little algebra, or even simple proportions, to solve the following problem:

Problem 3. Jose's car uses 10 liters of gas for a trip of 150 kilometers. Sam's car gets half the mileage that Jose's does. Henry's car uses 10 liters for two-thirds the distance that Jose can go in his car. How much gas does Henry need to go 250 kilometers?

Now for a classic puzzle, which I attempted when I was in grade school. Math means getting our hands dirty, so one way to do this puzzle is to draw a figure.

Problem 4. Two poles are each 100 feet high. A rope 150 feet long is strung between the tops of the poles. At its lowest point the rope sags to within 25 feet of the ground. How far apart are the poles?

The last question came from my son, when he was 3 years old. But it was only when he was 7 years old was I able to explain the answer in a way that he could understand.

Problem 5. Why do we humans have two eyes and two ears, and not just one of each? Is the second eye or ear just for backup, a spare organ, so to speak, or does it have another use? Explain.

E-mail your solutions, with explanations or proofs, to me at blessbook@yahoo.com as soon as you can. The first five readers with perfect solutions will receive a copy of my latest book "Why Is Math So Hard?" (Anvil, 2007).

A Healthy Stomach Helps Control Blood Sugar

The holiday season is a sweet time for delicious treats that are high in carbohydrates. When it is not converted by your body to enegry, it becomes glucose. Large amounts of glucose in your blood is bad for your blood sugar level, and may cause diabetes.

Greet the New Year with good health.
Take C-Lium Fibre everyday!

C-Lium Fibre is made from 100% natural psyllium husk, probably the best dietary fiber in the world. It effectively controls the digestion of carbohydrates to help prevent large amounts of glucose from being stored in your blood.

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New data on Merck's cervical cancer vaccine in women

MERCK'S CERVICAL CANCER VACCINE called human papillomavirus quadrivalent types 6, 11, 16, 18 recombinant vaccine prevented 91 percent persistent infection, low-grade cervical abnormalities, and precancers, and external genital lesions caused by HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18 compared with placebo (sugar pill), in women ages 24-45, according to new data presented recently at the 24th International Papillomavirus Conference (IPV) in Beijing, China.

The primary results evaluated women—about one-third (31 percent) of which were from Asia—who were free of infection from at least one vaccine HPV type when they began the study, and who remained free of infection with the relevant HPV type(s) until they completed the three-dose vaccination regimen. The MSD vaccine is currently indicated for girls and women aged 9-26 for the prevention of cervical cancer, precancerous or dysplastic lesions and genital warts caused by HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18.

At significant risk

"Women remain at significant risk for acquiring HPV infections and developing HPV-related diseases throughout their lifetime," said Dr. Eliav Barr, executive director of Biologics Clinical Research and head of the HPV Vaccine Program, Merck Research Laboratories. "These data build on the clinical program for our vaccine and will help us understand the potential benefit that the vaccine may have in women through age 45."

Merck will submit these data to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before the end of the year to seek an indication for women through age 45.

The international multicenter study, designed to examine if the MSD cervical cancer vaccine is effective at reducing disease and persistent infection caused by HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18, involved more than 3,800 women approximately one-third (31 percent) of which were from Asia (Philippines and Thailand). Women included in the study also had no history of LEEP (loop electrosurgical excision procedure) or hysterectomy; biopsy-diagnosed cervical HPV disease in the past five years, or history of genital warts.

Because the Merck vaccine is designed to prevent HPV 6, 11, 16, and 18 disease, rather than treat ongoing infection, the primary analysis of the study was conducted among women who were free of infection with at least one of the relevant HPV types at the start of the trial (baseline), remained free of infection with the relevant type(s) throughout the course of the vaccination period, and who received all three doses of vaccine and placebo.

Adverse experiences

In this study, the most common adverse experiences were injection site-related; injection site adverse experiences were higher in the vaccine group than placebo group (76.4 percent, 64.2 percent, respectively).

Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer affecting women and the second leading cause of cancer death in women. Globally, approximately 500,000 women are diagnosed each year and almost 300,000 die from the disease.

In the Asia-Pacific region, cervical cancer ranks second only to breast cancer as the most common cancer among women. In 2002, there were more than 100,000 new cases of cervical cancer and about 53,000 deaths from the disease in women in Southeastern and Eastern Asia. About 630 million people (1 in 10) are infected with HPV worldwide.

Avoid excessive eating, drinking this holiday season

By Charles E. Buban

FOR MANY INDIVIDUALS, maintaining a healthy habit this holiday season may seem like a daunting task.

And who could blame them? This is the time when holiday parties as well as reunions are more likely to be held and so people are exposed not just to more food, but more high-calorie, high-sugar, fat-laden foods.

"It's our culture, the comfort foods we have grown up with and associated with holiday season like lechon, ham, leche flan, brownies and candies. It is just the way we learned to enjoy the season for generations now, gulping down all these goodies as we entertain friends and family," observed Dr. Rogelio Tangco, a cardiologist from the Philippine General Hospital and Manila Doctors Hospital.

According to Tangco, no wonder more cases of hypertension are being observed in clinics and hospitals during the holiday season.

Stress and fatigue

"This is also a season when a lot of individuals experience heightened stress levels and fatigue as a result of being caught in the Christmas rush as well as in the task of entertaining an almost endless array of friends and associates. No wonder, a lot of individuals these days, head to the clinics and hospitals with their blood pressure significantly elevated along with their cholesterol levels," said the doctor, who warned that these confluences of factors could be debilitating or even fatal if not managed accordingly.

Having consistent elevated blood pressure increases the risk of developing heart disease, kidney disease, hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis), eye damage, and stroke (brain damage).

For this reason, the diagnosis of high blood pressure is important so efforts can be made to normalize blood pressure and prevent complications.

Only 14 percent

But Getz Pharma Philippines, which manufactures mostly off-patent drugs including one for high blood pressure, only 14 percent of Filipinos with the condition recognize their situation.

"The rest, unfortunately, are not aware of their condition so they don't do anything to control their high blood pressure much more to see a doctor or visit a hospital. They only do so when they are already in bad shape, which sometimes may be too late," Tangco said.

No. 1 risk

Indeed, high blood pressure remains the No. 1 risk factor for cardiovascular disease, and is one of the top causes for death, according to the World Health Organization.

He suggested that a spot check of one's blood pressure is reasonable, so is stepping into the weighing scale even after the New Year celebrations have passed.

"Be wary that all that bingeing can make your blood pressure go up," he cautioned. "Have your blood pressure taken, regardless of how you feel. A blood pressure of 140/90 is indicative of hypertension. While a BP below 140/90 is still normal, some doctors feel that those slightly below it should see ask their doctor if they now need to take a medicine."

Tangco pointed out that having a high blood pressure is a lifetime condition but could be managed by a combination of healthy diet, regular exercise, and appropriate medication.

No symptoms

Getz Pharma echoed Tangco's recommendations, saying that since having high blood pressure does not give off any prior symptoms that can be taken as a warning bell, patients who do not regularly go to a doctor or take medicine may live normally until he or she suffers a heart attack or stroke.

In this regard, Getz Pharma informed that the company manufactures Lopicard, a low-cost version of the drug besylate salt of amlodipine, which is used for treating high blood pressure and angina (usually severe and crushing chest pain due to an inadequate supply of oxygen to the heart muscle).

Enjoying the green

DISCOVER

Massie Santos Ballon

FOR THE PAST DECADE OR SO, I've watched children chasing their friends, climbing up and down playground equipment inside malls or watching fountains gush from mall floors. I can't help but remember that when I was about the same age, I was on weekend family picnics that included riding rental bikes (especially the sidecars with the FM radios) around the CCP Complex.

The indoor mentality seems to grow stronger over time. Based on the number of buses seen waiting in the parking lots of malls and other large shopping centers at various weekdays over the past few years, class field trips seem to gravitate toward indoor activities like shopping instead of actually exploring fields and parks.

Though students, teachers and chaperones alike arguably do a good deal of walking to hit every store on each floor—from one end of the mall to the other—they're not taking advantage of the views outdoors.

For safety reasons

Perhaps the choice to stay indoors isn't influenced by electronics such as computers and video games. In previous studies, many parents who fondly remembered playing outside as youngsters—"when they were able to explore nature without fear of accident or crime," is how Thompson's team worded it in their paper—said they now keep their own children indoors for safety reasons.

Still, with obesity rates rising worldwide, urban and environmental planners have been working on ways to get people, especially children and teenagers, outside more often.

A good reason

There's a good reason for wanting to instill the urge to explore nature early on. In the January 2008 issue of the journal Environment and Behavior, landscape architects in Scotland suggest that regular childhood visits to the woods or similarly green places influence adult attitudes toward these same areas.

The work was done by Catherine Ward Thompson from the Edinburgh College of Art together with Peter Aspinall and Alicia Montarzino from the Heriot-Watt University.

To reduce health concerns that come with sedentary lifestyles, many public health officials have advocated activities such as visiting local parks and walking instead of driving around local communities. Not only do visitors get to exercise, say the authorities, but they can also mentally relax surrounded by the trees and grass.

2 studies

Thompson and her colleagues based their report on two studies done in separate areas of Britain. From 2000 to 2002, the researchers conducted surveys in the rural and mining areas of central Scotland to see how important residents considered the woods and who used them. Questionnaires were filled out in public areas such as shopping centers.

In 2003, they surveyed users of parks and national reserves in communities ranging from rural to urban in the East Midlands of England. As a representative wooded area in the locality, one place where questionnaires were filled out was Sherwood Forest, better known in books and movies as the home of Robin Hood and his Merry Men.

Despite the caveats about the demographics of the survey respondents, the survey results from both locales were similar. A majority of the people who had regularly gone at least weekly to green spaces as children were regular visitors to such areas as adults. Proximity to parks and nature reserves had been a factor in these visits.

And so, as the song goes, this is Christmas. Between the parties and the presents, take a walk to the nearest park and enjoy what naturally grows there. There's time to decide if it's a habit worth forming while you're working off a few dessert calories. In the meantime, enjoy the fresh air before the next year is welcomed with firecrackers.

* * *

E-mail the author at massie@massie.com.

Lost and found

CAREPLUS

Christine F. Liwanag

SHE HAD A FULFILLING CAREER, A wonderful husband, successful children and a beautiful home in San Diego, California. Life was perfect for 71-year-old Linda Macaraeg. One day in 2004, she was afflicted by a mysterious malady that was initially suspected to be a stroke. Linda was never the same again.

She would mumble incomprehensible words, fail to finish sentences and comprehend simple concepts and became confused in going about her daily routine. She also began losing her voice and became restless. Her behavior changed dramatically. She became an impulsive shopper and spender, constantly maxing out her credit cards; at times, she indiscriminately gave money away.

No known cure

Linda's husband Ted brought her to several hospitals in the United States before she was diagnosed with Pick's disease, a progressive, presenile degenerative neurological disease similar to Alzheimer's disease. There is no known cure for the disease.

Her physical and emotional health was deteriorating fast. She refused to eat and began losing weight, weakening her until she became malnourished. Eventually, she became totally mute and physically handicapped, unable to even bathe or groom herself, dress, eat and go to the toilet on her own.

"We were desperate," Ted recalls.

Their daughter, a hospital administrator in the United States, had a friend who suggested St. Luke's Medical Center. The Macaraegs knew St. Luke's by reputation—that it was better equipped than most US hospitals and one of the world's best hospitals. They immediately booked a flight to the Philippines.

Initial assessment

St. Luke's consultant neurologist Dr. Lina Salud performed an initial assessment of Linda's condition before referring her for further workup to the hospital's other medical services units.

A digital swallowing test showed a neuromuscular disorder was the cause of a condition (dysphagia) that hindered Linda's ability to swallow. Pick's disease was considered in the secondary diagnosis.

THE MACARAEG couple in the United States before seeking treatment at St. Luke's

DR. Jacqueline Dominguez with the couple at St. Luke's Memory Center

A 24-hour Video EEG (a test that records the brain's electrical activity) showed that Linda had difficulty initiating sleep and in the few times she began to fall asleep her legs would periodically move and rouse her. A nerve and muscle electrical conduction test on her arms and legs yielded no significant results.

An MRI scan showed Linda's brain was shrinking, particularly in the temporal lobes, the part of the brain associated with the senses of hearing and smell and memories. The scan also detected signs of low blood supply to the brain. Linda was referred to the St. Luke's Memory Center. After evaluating the patient's condition and medical test results, the center's head Dr. Jacqueline Dominguez diagnosed Linda as suffering from Dementia Syndrome Atypical AD with initial symptoms of Progressive Aphasia, a primary disorder of speech and language.

Dementia is the progressive decline in the cognitive function due to damage or disease in the brain beyond what might be expected from normal aging. Areas particularly affected by dementia are memory, attention, language and problem-solving. Especially in the later stages of the condition, affected persons may be disoriented to time (not knowing what day of the week, day of the month, month, or even what year it is), place (not knowing where they are), and person (not knowing who they are). Symptoms of dementia can be either reversible or irreversible depending on the cause of the disease. Less than 10 percent of dementia cases are reversible.

Dr. Dominguez and her team customized a comprehensive Dementia Management Program for Linda. Aside from medications, a feeding tube was inserted through Linda's stomach to address her inability to swallow food. The program also included fall and stroke prevention, vaccination and caregiver education.

Immediate impact

The program had an immediate impact. Linda can now recognize people and stay oriented to time and places. She is able to walk on her own and communicates through gestures, waving her hands and shaking the hands of friends. Her restlessness has diminished and she is able to stay relaxed for longer periods of time.

Whenever Ted kids her, she pinches him. With some assistance from a caregiver, she is now able to manage her personal hygiene. She is progressively gaining weight and her skin's pallor has now been replaced by a healthy pink. Upon Dr. Dominguez's recommendation, Linda is now enrolled in a speech therapy clinic to help her communicate.

"We thank and commend Dr. Dominguez and her team at the Memory Center, as well as the staff of St. Luke's other medical units. Their expertise and genuine concern was a big help in my wife's successful treatment and recovery," Ted says. "We will definitely share the good news about St. Luke's to our relatives and friends in the US."

* * *

For feedback, please e-mail the Healthcare Technology and Outcomes Information Bureau at inquire@htoib.com.

KIDS QUIZ

By Emman Cena

Doctors and diseases

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, MERRYmakers are likely to indulge and feast on food served hot and delicious. So avoid bingeing and maintain a balanced and healthy diet. Consult your doctors—have your cholesterol, blood sugar levels and whatnots checked. See your dentist too, and have those sweet teeth good pampering!

This week's quiz will focus on our ever trusty medical people and their fields of specialization.

Check your knowledge by matching each doctor on the left with their corresponding specialization on the right column. Good luck kiddos! Happy Holidays!

Doctor	Inventor
1. Cardiologist	a) Skin
2. Dermatologist	b) Heart disease
3. Gynecologist	c) Blood
4. Hematologist	d) Eyes
5. Histologist	e) Ears
6. Nephrologist	f) Nervous system
7. Neurologist	g) Children
8. Ophthalmologist	h) Female reproduction
9. Otologist	i) Cells and tissues
10. Pediatrician	j) Kidneys

Score: 1-4 Good; 5-7 Very Good; 8-10 - Excellent

REFERENCE: BOOK OF LISTS, 2005

Answers: 1-b, 2-a, 3-h, 4-c, 5-i, 6-j, 7-f, 8-d, 9-e, 10-g

The Cheaper Medicine Bill the House's Christmas gift

By Rafael R. Castillo, MD

MEDICAL FILES

IT'S A GOOD CHRISTMAS PRESENT for the millions of Filipinos who have to constantly make a choice between buying their needed medicines and their other necessities in life. The House of Representatives has finally approved earlier this week HB 2844, otherwise known as the Cheaper Medicine Bill. The bill aims to reduce prices, particularly of essential medicines considerably so they can be within reach of the majority of Filipinos.

Just yesterday, a patient of mine who's taking Plavix, a blood thinner for his heart disease costing more than P100 per tablet told me he hasn't bought any new clothes or shoes since I prescribed him the drug more than a year ago. I felt so beaten with guilt that I shifted him to Aspilet which will cost him only a peso daily.

A big boost

Should the house bill together with its senate version become a law—provided it is implemented properly—it can truly be a big boost to improve healthcare in the country. Otherwise, or with just half-hearted implementation, it will just be another of the many "decorative" laws we have.

I was hoping they would change the name of the bill to something like Affordable Medicine Bill. Cheap always connote a lower-priced but perhaps inferior-quality product. It might give the message that the overriding factor for marketing a pharmaceutical product is its cost, with the quality playing a secondary factor.

When it comes to essential life-saving medicines, the quality cannot be compromised. So the quality assuring the efficacy and safety of the product must be guaranteed first, together with an affordable cost. Any self-respecting executive in the pharmaceutical industry will agree that this is possible. And I'm sure the drug companies will be happy at the thought that they can still operate a profitable business and at the same time render service to the people by keeping the prices of their medicines within reach of the ordinary worker.

It has been shown by various surveys that the cost of drugs in the Philippines is among the highest in Southeast Asia. It is higher by 50 to 70 percent than in other Asian countries, which makes it difficult to understand why the same drug manufactured by the same company has different prices in different prices. It would seem that the pricing of medicine here is based on what a target base of consumers--those who can afford-- can bear or afford to pay. It's not based on the conventional pricing scheme based on the actual cost of goods plus other expenses (including research) plus a reasonable profit margin.

Reasonably priced

A reasonable profit margin is, of course something relative. I'm sure the majority of Filipino pharmaceutical executives would still like to sleep tightly at the end of the day knowing that every pill they sell is reasonably priced, allowing the people to afford them, and allowing the company also to remain profitable to compensate its stakeholders. This is the happy balance which I'm sure can be arrived at, not a win-lose scenario wherein the drug company is raking in tons of profits at the expense of patients who can barely afford the medicines.

I suggest that drug companies, especially the multinationals, voluntarily bring down the prices of their medicines which probably will make some of the provisions of this bill unnecessary. I believe this will be a most welcome gesture from them. Some have actually done it either indirectly, through discount coupons or by introducing another brand of the same medicine produced by the same manufacturer at half the cost.

Laudable marketing strategy

Call it corporate pride or a face-saving scheme, to me, this is still a laudable marketing strategy. Never mind the fact that they could have done so right at the start when they marketed their product. Whether it's a sincere gesture, a result of pressure, guilt purging or simply a no-choice situation because of competition, the bottom line is that the needed medicine is now available at half the price or less.

I must commend local pharma executives like John Dumpit of Therapharma (Unilab). They must be partly credited for the relatively lower prices now of essential medicines. Five years ago John was a David fighting head-on the Goliaths in the industry. But his battlecry, always quoting the vision of the late Unilab founder Jose Y. Campos, resonated well in the industry: "High-quality medicines at affordable prices."

Direct beneficiaries

Phenomenally, it gained the support of the medical community and the patients themselves, who were the direct beneficiaries of this bold move. Gradually, the prices of medicines for hypertension, cholesterol problems and diabetes were reset from what some called a cartel-set price, to a more socially responsible price at half or less. This is quite evident in all new product introductions after Therapharma and the other Unilab divisions waged this price war. I'm commending all other pharma executives, both from multinational and local companies who have shifted to this new paradigm in drug pricing. They may not have initiated it but they have heeded the public's call.

We look forward to the final enactment of House Bill 2844 and Senate Bill 2263 into a law. I'm sure it will not be a "placebo pill" as some oppositionist label it. It may be a bitter pill to swallow for some, but if we have the majority's interest in mind, we must be united in swallowing this pill. There will be some unexpected kinks in its implementation but the important thing is that the government must exert sincere political will to effectively implement it and that everyone else-since everyone is a stakeholder to this bill-should support it from their end in whatever way they can. I wish all our readers a joyful and meaningful celebration of Christmas.

BUSINESS

Mortgage mess squeezes Wall Street bonuses

NEW YORK—WALL STREET BONUSES are the latest casualty of the subprime mortgage crunch.

What began as a blowout year for global investment banks ended on a disastrous note, marred by profit warnings, losses and layoffs at almost every investment bank not named Goldman Sachs Group.

Banks hit by losses on mortgages, related securities and leverage loans are cutting back annual performance payouts—in some cases by more than half—and paying a bigger portion through shares instead of cash. Even top performers at some firms are getting pinched.

"It's going to be brutal. The bonus pool is shrinking," said John Kim, global head of capital markets sector at Korn/Ferry International.

Starting last week, Wall Street's banks began telling executives what they earned for all their long hours.

Overall bonuses were down from last year, headhunters said, though individual payouts are all over the map.

The employees who sell, trade and package debt securities—and generated the bulk of losses for Citigroup, Merrill Lynch, UBS and Morgan Stanley this year—saw their payments slashed. Likewise the bankers who arranged financing for leveraged buyouts, creating commitments that fueled additional losses.

Bonuses for a handful of the most successful fixed income traders this year were flat to down 5 percent. Other top performers were down 10 to 20 percent, according to recruiters getting early feedback from clients.

These are the lucky ones, considering that the weakest performers saw bonuses slashed by a third. Some individuals are reporting 75 to 80-percent cuts.

Cuts were particularly deep at Merrill Lynch, which is expected to report massive credit and mortgage losses for the quarter ending Dec. 31.

Even top credit and mortgage staffers will see payments cut by 50 percent, with others seeing their bonuses slashed 75 percent.

The pain also extends to the top of the ladder. Morgan Stanley CEO John Mack this week said he will get no bonus this year, after $9.4 billion in losses led to a quarterly loss.

Bear Stearns, which posted a loss Thursday, said CEO Jimmy Cayne and other top executives will get no bonuses.

The exception was Goldman, which reported record profit and revenue and boosted compensation by 23 percent to $20.2 billion this year, the most paid out by any bank ever.

On average, Goldman's 30,500 employees each received $661,490, double the amount paid to counterparts at Morgan Stanley and Lehman.

A few stars will get much more. Goldman CEO Lloyd Blankfein is expected to take home as much as $70 million, while the proprietary traders who generated billions of dollars in gains betting against subprime will get $15 million each.

Elsewhere on Wall Street, not everyone will go home disappointed. Several businesses across Wall Street had banner years, such as mergers and acquisitions. Top-tier bankers in hot sectors, equities traders and stock underwriters saw bonuses rise 5 to 10 percent, headhunters said.

Bankers in Asia and other fast-growing regions, hot commodities as Wall Street expands overseas, also got more.

Traders with strong technology, credit and risk analysis skills will still be in demand, while bankers in active sectors like energy and biotech can command higher payments.

One result of the subprime mess, which drained revenue and weakened balance sheets, is that many big banks are paying more of their bonuses in stock.

Investment banks that reported results this month say they are still hiring.

But after years of bold expansion and a flurry of hiring, banks are eager to control costs in businesses hit by the crisis and that means a small bonus is better than no bonus. *Reuters*

Financials lift shares, but jumpy over credit

More volatility in stock markets expected

SINGAPORE—STRENGTH IN FINANCIALS, after a report said Singapore state investor Temasek may invest $5 billion in Merrill Lynch, gave Asian share markets respite from anxiety over the credit crisis on Friday, tempting some investors away from safe-haven bonds.

The Wall Street Journal report helped soothe some fears that the worst of the credit crisis was far from over.

This concern reared it head again following news of Bear Stearns' first ever quarterly loss and the world's biggest bond insurer MBIA's perilous exposure to risky debt.

European markets are expected to rise, with financial bookmakers calling Britain's FTSE 100, Germany's DAX and France's CAC-40 up between 0.7 and 0.9 percent.

As many investors took off for the holidays, reluctant to take new positions as the credit crisis plays out, the dollar traded at around a two-month high against the euro at $1.4364 and near a six-week high against the yen at 113.07 by early yesterday afternoon.

Although investors picked up battered banks, such as Australia's Westpac, a quarterly loss for investment bank Bear Stearns and news of MBIA Inc.'s exposure to $30.6 billion of collateralized debt obligations it insures have driven home view that fallout from the US subprime mortgage crisis will continue.

"The nature of the markets now is that they are fundamentally a volatile thing. So if you have a few days where it does fall, you will inevitably have a bounce. But the direction is sideways to down," said Frank Villante, chief investment officer with Souls Funds Management in Australia.

Tokyo's Nikkei ended 1.5 percent higher. Hitachi Ltd. rose after the Nikkei business daily said the firm plans to sell a minority stake in its struggling hard disk drive business to US investment fund Silver Lake.

MSCI's measure of other Asia Pacific stocks was up 1.6 percent.

The index is about 13 percent below its Nov. 1 record high, but is still up about 29 percent as the year draws to a close.

The gain is about 4 times that for the MSCI All-Country World Index so far this year.

In South Korea the benchmark Kospi was up 1.8 percent, boosted by a jump in Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering as investors increasingly bet the shipbuilder would come to the market early next year under president-elect Lee Myung-bak's pledge to push for privatization of state-controlled assets.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng, Taiwan's benchmark index and Singapore's Straits Times rose between 1.1 and 1.7 percent.

Oil prices held steady above $91 a barrel as worries over the US economy countered a steep fall in crude stockpiles.

Gold changed hands at just above $800 an ounce.

In the bond market, Treasury futures were slightly lower in Asia, while Japanese government bond futures slipped 0.36 point to 136.49 All eyes will be on the release later of the Federal Reserve's favored gauge of inflation—core personal consumption expenditures. *Reuters*

Oil prices rise on supply woes

SINGAPORE—OIL PRICES ROSE FRIDAY as the market focused on persistent supply concerns following a midweek report that US crude oil supplies fell for the fifth straight week.

Worries about a possible slowing of the US economy that could lead to a drop in fuel demand, however, continued to weigh on prices.

Energy investors were shaken by the US Conference Board's report Thursday that its index of leading indicators dropped 0.4 percent in November to the lowest level in more than two years. Declines in the index tend to precede economic slowdowns or recessions.

Light, sweet crude for February delivery added 33 cents to $91.39 a barrel in Asian electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange by mid-afternoon in Singapore. The contract fell 18 cents overnight to settle at $91.06 a barrel in the floor session.

Prices were supported by forecasts that Opec oil shipments were falling.

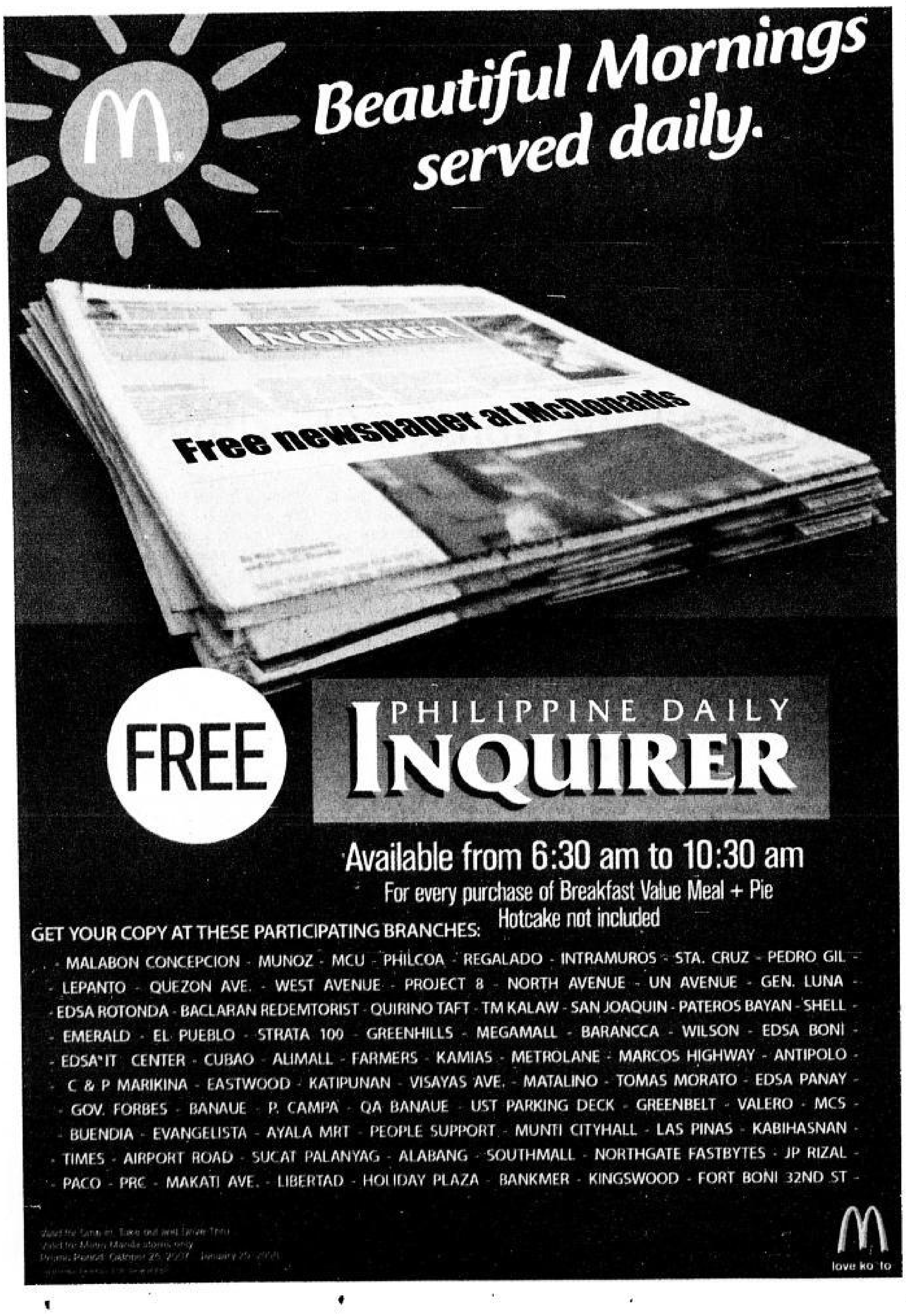
Dow Jones Newswires reported that Oil Movements, a British tanker tracking firm, expects crude shipments from Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to fall 230,000 barrels a day to 24.2 million barrels a day during the four weeks ending Jan. 5. The forecast reversed earlier Oil Movements predictions that oil shipments would rise.

Roy Mason, head of Oil Movements, said the drop-off in crude shipments was normal for this time of year.

The market fluctuated between gains and losses in Thursday's session as traders weighed forecasts for a warmer winter—which would lower demand for heating and crude oil—against data suggesting supplies are falling.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Thursday that the beginning of winter will be warmer than normal in the eastern two-thirds of the United States, which includes the Northeast, the world's largest heating oil market, Dow Jones Newswires reported.

Meanwhile, the US Energy Department reported Wednesday that crude oil supplies fell last week by 7.6 million barrels. Much of that drop was due to a decline in imports of almost a million barrels a day because fog closed the Houston Ship Channel last week, analysts said. *AP*



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Airbus signs deals for 30 jets for Vietnam Airlines

HANOI—AIRBUS ON FRIDAY SIGNED deals for 30 passenger jets with Vietnam Airlines and an aircraft leasing company, the latest orders in a major shopping spree by the state-run Asian carrier.

The European aircraft maker signed contracts, agreed in principle and announced on Oct. 1 in Paris, for 10 A350-900XWB aircraft and 20 A321-200s at a ceremony in the capital Hanoi.

The 30 Airbus jets have a total catalogue price of nearly $3.8 billion. The first A321s are due to be delivered by 2012 and the first wide-body, long-haul A350s by 2016, the companies said.

The Vietnam Aircraft Leasing Company (VALC), which is co-owned by Vietnam Airlines and a number of state banks and companies in the communist country, bought 10 of the A321s, while the airline bought the other 20 jets.

Vietnam Airlines—which says it hopes to become one of Asia's leading carriers alongside Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines—last month signed a deal with US aircraft maker Boeing for 12 787-8 Dreamliners.

The latest deals were signed by Airbus CEO in charge of customer relations John Leahy, Vietnam Airlines CEO Pham Ngoc Minh and VALC CEO Tran Long.

"Airbus is proud to be playing a central role in the continued modernization of the rapidly developing Vietnamese air transport industry," said Leahy.

Air travel is fast growing in the country of 84 million—which has seen tourism and business travel surge amid more than 8-percent economic growth last year—and foreign airlines and budget carriers are flocking to Vietnam.

Minh said "demand for air services between Vietnam's major cities and from Vietnam to countries in the Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), Northeast Asia, Europe and North America regions has significantly increased."

Vietnam Airlines, which is set to be part-privatized soon, now has direct flights to 26 major cities in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, and plans to launch direct flights to Los Angeles by late next year.

The carrier now operates 47 aircraft, including 10 Boeing 777s, 10 Airbus A320, 11 A321 and four A330. It will receive four more A321s next year and four Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners which it ordered several years ago from 2009.

For shorter routes, Vietnam Airlines this month also ordered five ATR 72-500 turbo-propeller planes to add to its existing fleet of 10 aircraft from the Toulouse, France-based aircraft maker.

Under a modernization plan, Vietnam Airlines says it expects to expand its fleet to 85 aircraft by 2015 and 110 planes by 2020.

Airbus parent, the European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company (EADS), also signed a memorandum of understanding Friday with Vietnam to explore future areas of cooperation in the aerospace industry.

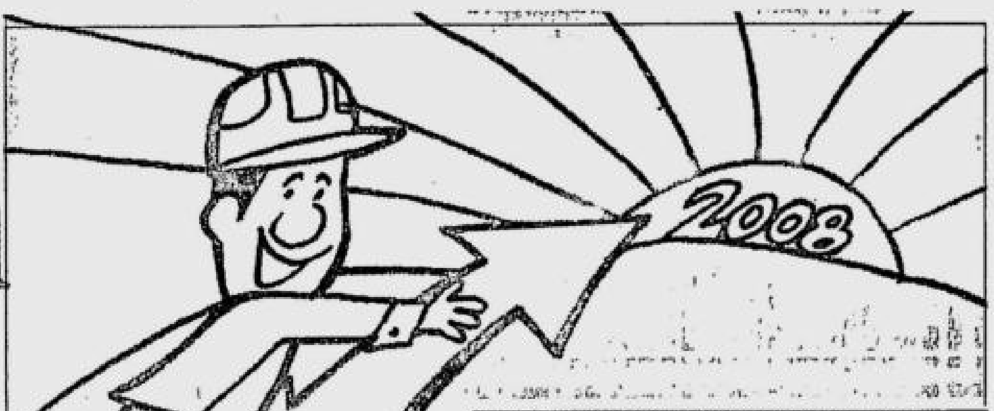
Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries last month said it would become the world's first manufacturer to set up an aircraft-related production plant in Vietnam, with a facility due to open next year. *AFP*

Editor Cesar D. Mangawang

PROPERTY

2008 PROPERTY FORECAST

'Positive growth from OFWs, but be wary'



By Tessa R. Salazar

(First of two parts)

THE REAL ESTATE growth the Philippines experienced in 2007 will continue in 2008.

CB Richard Ellis Philippines says the industry is expected to sustain its upward trajectory in 2008, driven by continued demand in business process outsourcing and traditional business sectors, an increased number of real estate players going public and higher foreign investment.

Rick M. Santos, chair of the full-service real estate services firm and managing director of CBRE Hong Kong, said in a statement that it is expected for the Philippine real estate market to grow at 8.5 percent next year and "at a similar rate in the medium term." He said this is a sign to start building relationships for investing and generating profit.

And despite the decline of the dollar and the buying power of would-be homeowners, real estate player Century Properties Chair Jose EB Antonio said in a statement that the positive impact emanating from OFWs will continue for the real estate sector. He said that Filipinos abroad are still finding value in Philippine-based homes vis-à-vis US domiciled houses, given the latter's decline. He added that real estate is "very location specific; the cool-down in US housing has not affected real estate in Asia."

Caution

Prince Christian R. Cruz, senior economist for Global Property Guide, however, said substantial market reform would be needed to sustain the real estate boom.

Though the market is positive, there are warning signs and that "the government should respond to these warning signs."

Cruz cited the BSP Consumer Expectation Survey for Q4 2007, which indicates that only 1.3 percent of OFW households in NCR intend to use the remittance for purchasing a house. He added that during the second quarter of 2006, as much as 10.9 percent of OFW households said that they intend to purchase a house.

"Our local buyers here should be given enough attention also, not just from the players but especially from the government, because right now the government is not really doing anything to address the concern that the market is fueled primarily by overseas buyers," he told INQUIRER Property in a phone interview.

Cruz said that some agents have reported that about 60 to 90 percent of properties have been sold to an OFW or a Filipino immigrant abroad and their families.

"The problem with this is that it is vulnerable to severe peso appreciation against the dollar, as what we are witnessing right now. About half of OFWs work in the Middle East, while a significant amount work in Hong Kong; they all earn in dollars. On the other hand, about 70 percent of Filipino immigrants abroad are in the United States."

Cruz added that another warning sign is the amount of loans to the local market.

Most important message

"The most important message I want the real estate readers and the government should know is that the market should expand more, not just to the overseas Filipinos but to the local demands. If you rely entirely on overseas Filipinos given the weakening of the dollar, then you should start looking at the local market."

He added that as the peso appreciates against the dollar, overseas Filipinos' foreign earnings buy less Philippine goods. And if the peso continues to appreciate, OFWs would find property purchases to be more expensive.

Cruz explained: "For the real estate mortgage to persist, demand from local buyers should strengthen. In other countries, a housing market boom is accompanied by a mortgage boom, i.e. most property purchases are financed by a loan."

In the Philippines, even with an ongoing real estate boom, loans to real estate, renting and business activities contracted by 7 percent from Q4 2006 to Q1 2007. Loans to the real sector fell 0.5 percent to end Q1-2007 from a year earlier. This was in sharp contrast to the 12.9 percent increase in loans to end 2006.

The lack of mortgage options in the Philippines continues to hamper the real estate market. Despite the drop in the base interest rates, mortgage rates remain high, typically, at double digits. Most mortgages in the Philippines are indexed to the Treasury bill rate, depending on the length of loan maturity. The 364-day T-bill rate was at 5.6 percent from June to December 2007, significantly lower compared to the average of 14.4 percent in 2000.

Cruz said: "The number of companies going public next year and then all these supplies, to a certain extent, can create a negative impact on the market as a whole. If there are too many players, the market might be swamped with too many properties … similar to pre-Asian crisis scenario (in 1997)."

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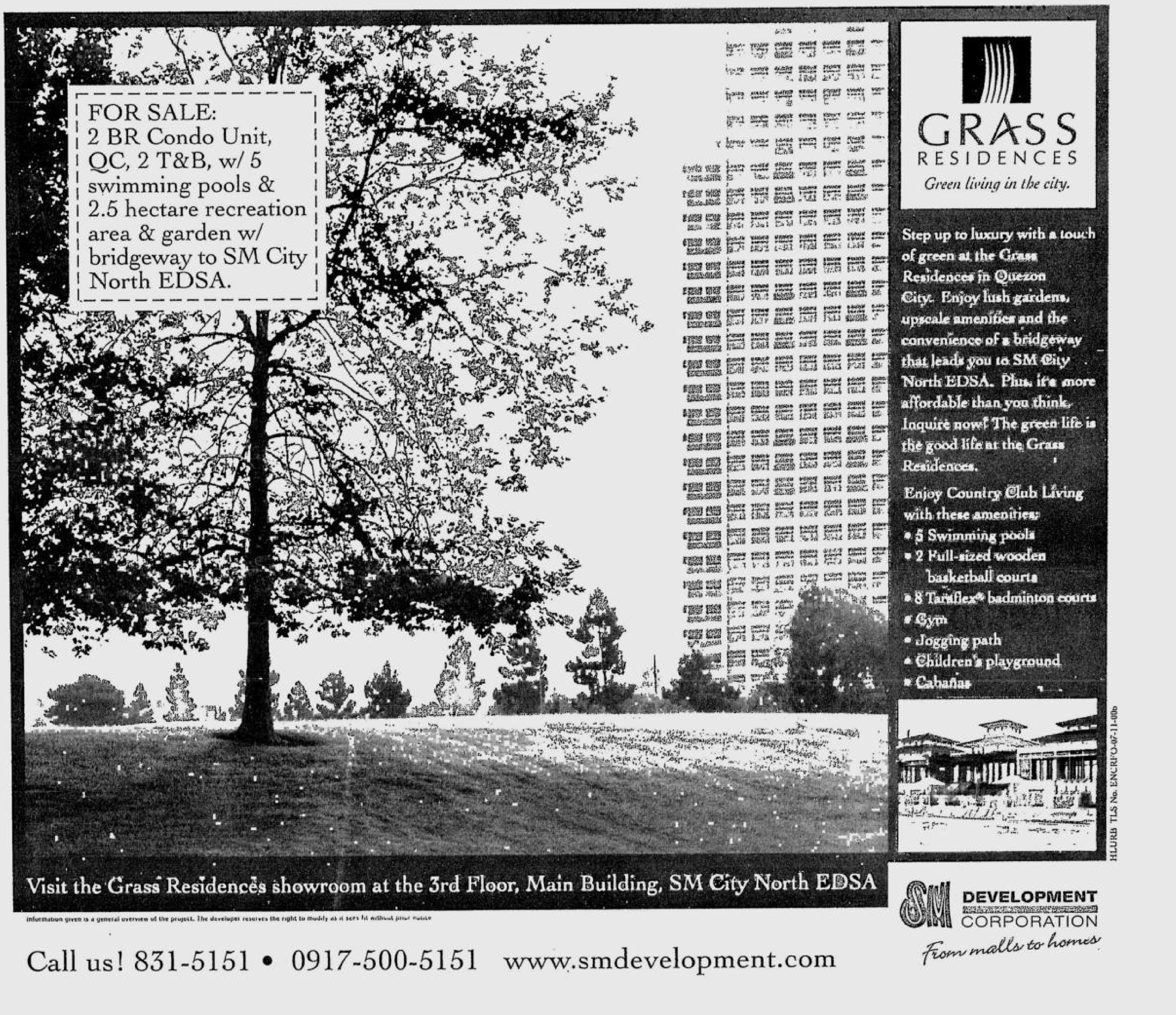
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Joseph, the builder

LIVING ARCHITECTURE

Marcos de Guzman Jr.

AS WE APPROACH CHRISTMAS DAY, WE reflect on its relevance to the regular pattern of our lives, our relationships, our behavior, our profession. For architects and builders so immersed in the nitty-gritty of cost and construction, appointments and deadlines, the significance of the season may not easily be evident.

However, only when we find the connection can we truly claim that Christmas is alive and well for us. Recently, I had an enlightening exchange with architect Mihlgrace Samonteza, who explained how today's architect and builder can discover a profound link to Christmas. Below are her thoughts.

Joseph, the carpenter

The key to connecting Christmas with architecture is in the person of St. Joseph. We have come to know him as the carpenter from Nazareth. Jesus himself had inherited this trade; he is described by the people as the "son of the carpenter." Those in the field of architecture and construction can relate to him through his life of hard work, producing furniture and structures for shelter.

Joseph was an ordinary worker who, through manual skill, earned a living for his family and enriched the trade of his hometown. Despite the apparent ordinariness of his daily routine, his very name, which means "God will add," leads us to realize that there is in fact a third dimension in everything we do: the supernatural meaning of work. Joseph allowed himself to be God's humble instrument to accomplish the plan of salvation. We, too, frail and inept as we are, can do great things if we, like Joseph, let God add meaning to our lives.

We can achieve this by doing our work well, serving others through it, and offering it for the glory of God. A time dedicated for prayer is essential to open ourselves to the promptings of God. Joseph has shown admirable promptness in carrying out God's instructions. Even if our daily schedule seems to be dictated by meetings and deadlines, we should also make it a point to schedule and keep our appointments with God.

Joseph the family man

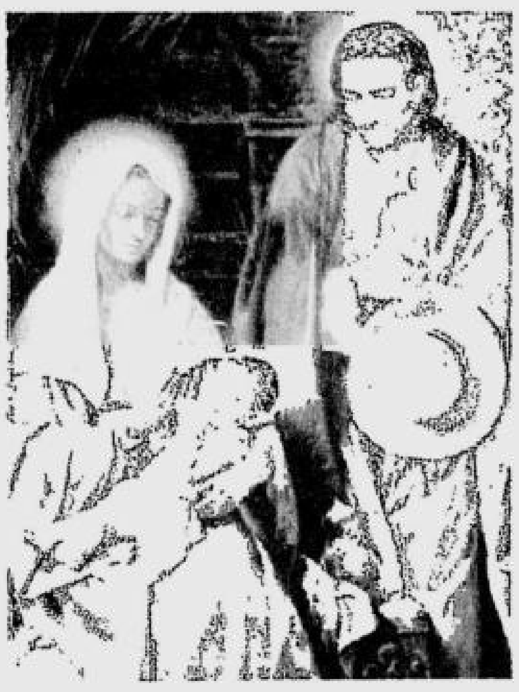
"Here is the wise and faithful servant, whom the Lord has put in charge of his household" (cf. Lk 12: 42). Joseph merited this description, as narrated in the Bible. This is a reminder for every professional, that amid the accomplishments and social recognition that he enjoys, he is also the man placed in charge of his home.

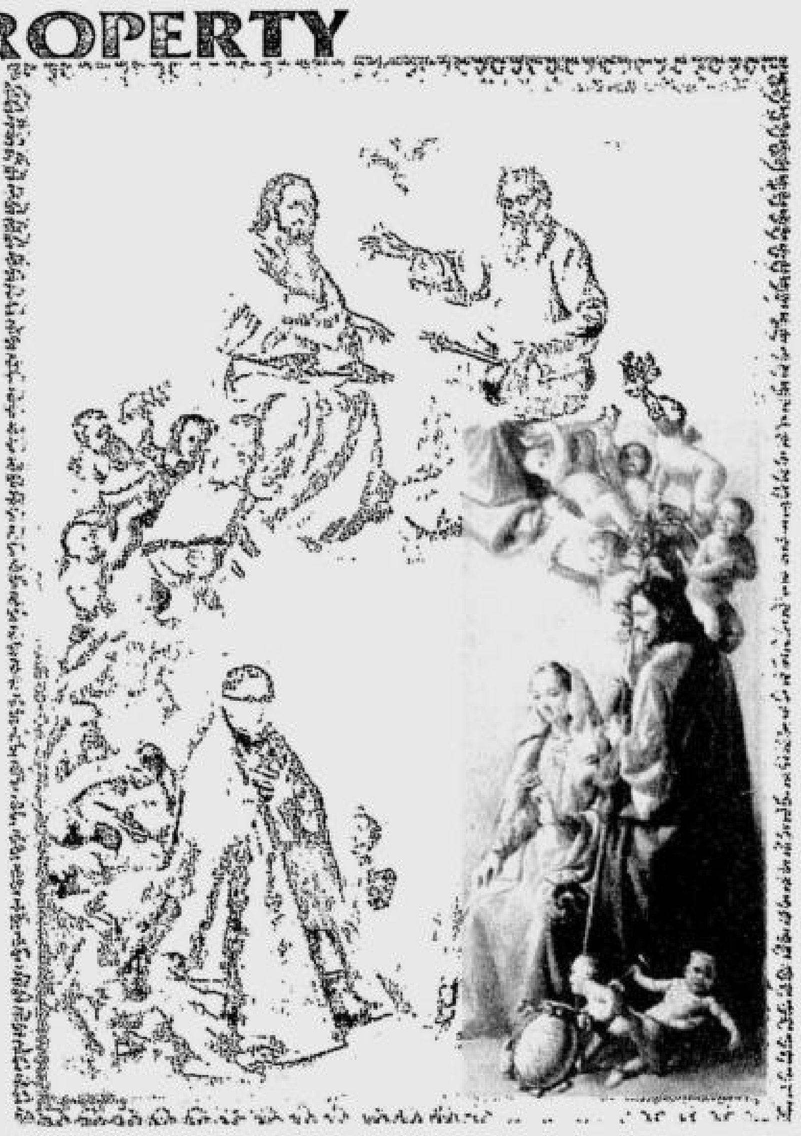
In the case of the architect, he is the man, not only gifted to design and build houses but most importantly to create and nurture a home grounded on a firm foundation.

An example of a chaste life

Joseph is commonly illustrated in paintings and pictures as an old man, perhaps with the intention of emphasizing his role as a protector of Mary. However, more accurate narratives refer to him as a man only a few years older than Mary. Mary got married at about 14 or 15.

They were both very young and presumably very eligible. However, the will of God and their role in accomplishing it was so much clearer than any other concern. They kept their love pure by vowing to dedicate all their energies, attention and affection to the care of Jesus.





THESE paintings show the young and strong Joseph, by artist Armando Pareja in 1995 for the parish of St. Josemaria Escriva in Rome.

In recent years, there has been a greater demand for many architects and engineers to work abroad. For them, St. Joseph will even more be an inspiring example of fidelity. Separation from families sometimes brings with it an interior distraction for money and distorted affection. A devotion to St. Joseph can alleviate the struggle to overcome these.

Go to Joseph

"Ite ad Joseph." This was first spoken in the Old Testament and refers as well to St. Joseph, the carpenter, the family man, the servant of God. We have so much to learn from him. Learning from him will point us toward the meaning of Christmas in our lives.

For your comments, please e-mail to marcosdeguzman@yahoo.com.

AWESOME STRUCTURES

By Emman Cena

The Santa Claus Village

COME CHRISTMAS TIME, LEGEND says that a fat jolly man in red coat and trousers brings gifts on the wishers' doors. Mythical anecdotes would say he lives far up north in the land of perpetual snow. He may not be true to all, but the tradition of Santa Claus completes the holiday vibe.

In Finland, the myth has been lived for years now with the Santa Claus Village, said to be built to be the home of the dear fat-bellied man they call Joulupukki (Santa).

The village is an amusement park near Rovaniemi in the Lapland region of Finland. Many people believe that Santa Claus comes from Lapland.

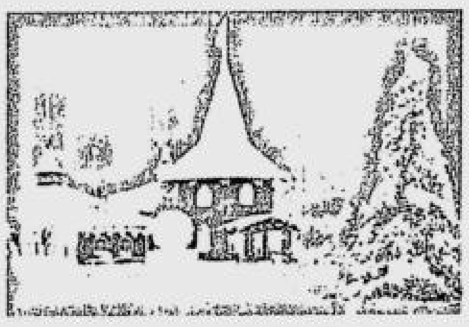
Christmas house is the newest attractive destination in the village. The house is the third log building with a tower and has a very unique architecture. It hosts the best souvenir shop of Lappish products in the village, a cozy restaurant as well as the unique Christmas exhibition.

The exhibition covers today's Christmas customs as well as centuries-old Finnish and foreign Christmas traditions. One can also learn about the real Santa Claus as well as the history of the Christmas tree inside the village. To your eyes delight, the Christmas house is also home to the Elves' Toy Factory.

Somewhere tucked inside the village is the Santa Claus Post Office, accommodating a large variety of Christmas-related items, Christmas cards and CDs. Located inside the village's main building is the house where visitors can take photographs and chat with a prototype Santa Claus. However, there is an "office hour" for Santa Claus but he may not be in the office all the time even when the village is open.

There are also many shops and restaurants inside the park selling a variety of items related to Santa Claus and the Lapland region. A Swarovski shop is located in the village's main building.

Santa Claus Village is located about 8 km northeast of Rovaniemi City and about 2 km from Rovaniemi Airport.



CAMELLA PRESTIGE'S TREVI

Rising to the demands of fast-paced urban lifestyle

INDIVIDUALS LIVING FAST-PACED lifestyles and with challenging careers deserve more than just a plain residence to come home to. Urban living standards continue to escalate and important residential facets include stylish architecture and interior design, strategic location and round-the-clock security. Today, the ideal home also includes features to rejuvenate residents and complement their urban lifestyle.

Camella Prestige, the developer of luxuriously appointed, veritable investment residences, launched a master-planned condominium enclave to address such living requirements—the Laureano di Trevi Towers located on Pasong Tamo in Makati City.

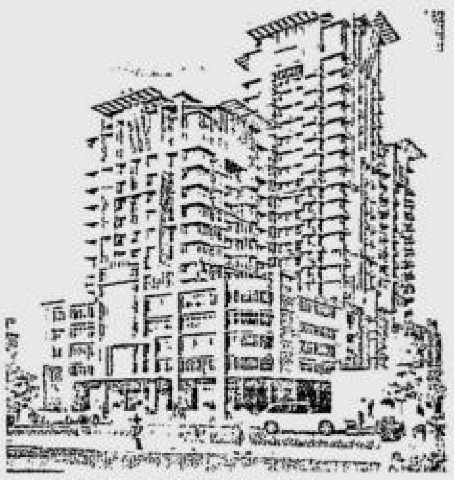
The high-rise condominium of Trevi Towers will span over 5,000 square meters of strategically located property. With a total of three interconnected towers, over 1,000 exclusive residences will be available; Tower 1 has 28 stories. Tower 2 is a 37-story rise, while Tower 3 has 24 levels.

Vertical residences

Camella Prestige tapped the expertise of interior designer Wilmer Lopez and his creative team at W. Lopez Design to lend an urban chic ambiance while marrying modern and classic details to each model unit. A selection of carefully designed units is offered: single-bedroom unit from 20 to 31 sq m, and combined 2-bedroom unit with a 40-sq-m floor area. The penthouse units present a more lavish living option with a floor area of 87 to 180 sq m.

Each unit boasts a balcony to enable residents to savor fresh air and a glimpse of the Makati skyline. A low amortization of P5,800 per month is available to bring you closer to your dream of owning your ideal vertical residence.

The first five levels of Towers 1 and 2 are allocated for parking spaces while the first five levels of Tower 3, which is in front of Pasong Tamo, will house different commercial establishments for the shopping and dining convenience of residents.



LAUREANO di Trevi Towers

First-class features, comforts

Trevi Towers break free from the square and dull confines of traditional condominium living by incorporating a grand Sky Plaza in its masterplan. It will interconnect all three towers with its al fresco location at the roof deck of the podium.

The Sky Plaza is dedicated to exclusive, first-class lifestyle amenities and facilities. Residents freely roam here and relax at the al fresco and promenade areas, rock garden, and deck while surrounded by quaint trellises and lush landscaping.

The highlight of the Sky Plaza is a magnificent pool stretching up to the length of one tower while water cascade features at the edge emit the soothing sound of flowing water. At Trevi, residents may take pleasure from a comfortable urban lifestyle practically right in their condominium's very own sophisticated "backyard."

Esthetic, functional design

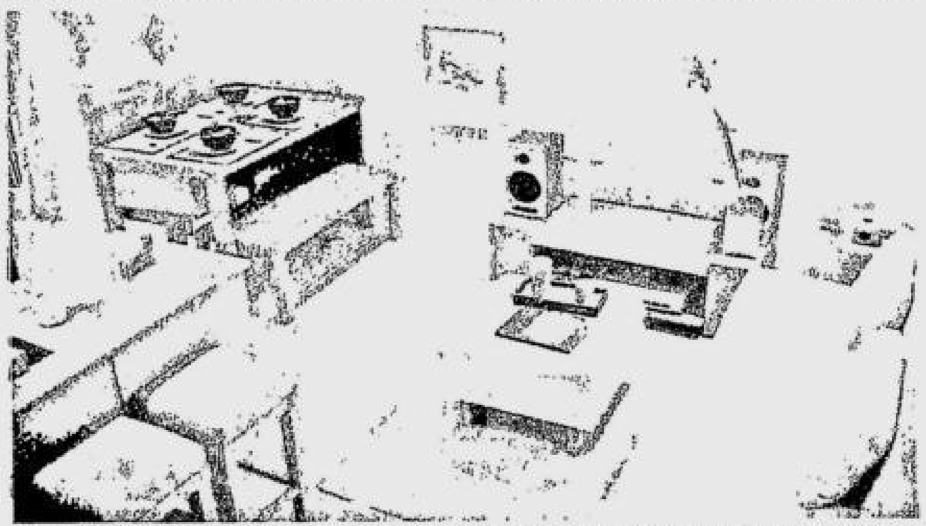
Palafox Associates, a premier architectural firm, is responsible for the intricate layout of Trevi. The modern architectural style is complemented by an energy-efficient design which utilizes ventilation gratings, sunsheds and heat reflective exterior closures. Each tower is purposefully arranged to enhance natural ventilation and lighting while providing unobstructed views of the Manila Bay sunset and Makati skyline.

Camella Homes & Communities, the preferred property developer of Filipinos and the largest provider of quality affordable homes in Mega Manila through its new unit, Camella Prestige, grants a sophisticated touch to vertical residences. Camella is a proud subsidiary of Vista Land & Lifescapes, the country's largest homebuilder offering homes for all income segments and catering to different lifestyles across the entire country.

Prime neighbors

Residing at the Trevi Towers brings the important developments and conveniences found in Makati City practically a stone's throw away from your home. It's just 5 minutes away from the Makati central business district, Greenbelt and the Asian Institute of Management, a quick walk from Makati Cinema Square, while the Don Bosco Technical Institute is just across Trevi.

The enclave is accessible from the north and south via the Sergio Osmeña highway (South Superhighway), and from the east and west via the Antonio Arnaiz Road (Pasay Road). Discover a vertical residence that rises up to high urban living standards at Camella Prestige's Laureano di Trevi Towers. For inquiries, call 772-1096 and 850-4682 or log on to www.camellaprestige.com.



THE TREVI'S model unit showcases a spacious dining and living area for condo living.

A perfect lounge experience

A PERFECT HOTEL LOUNGE EXPERIENCE experience was recreated at the Alta Vista de Boracay Manila sales pavilion in Taguig City for the special event which was held to introduce Brycl Resorts International, the newly appointed hotel management operator of the biggest condominium-hotel development in Boracay Island by DMCI Homes.

DMCI executives and special guests mixed and mingled with interested buyers and enthusiastic sellers at the special event where they enjoyed delectable cocktails and scrumptious pastries. The selection of cheese went well with the Australian red and white wine, which flowed freely into the evening.

The guests were entertained to the cool and soothing music of Pure Sound band, which dished out all-time favorites as well as jazz and contemporary pop songs. The venue's understated décor of white Japanese lanterns, white drapes and tropical blooms in shallow vases underscored the overall mood of intimacy and relaxation.

It was the perfect setting for the introduction of Alta Vista de Boracay's hotel operator and management firm, Brycl Resorts International. Created in 2000 and led by Chair and CEO Glenn S. Nakamura, Brycl Resorts understands the nuances of hotel operations, condominium hotels and serviced apartments with their extensive experience in managing hotels and resorts in the Philippines and Hawaii.

As a working partner, it seeks to provide a synergistic and common sense approach to condominium hotel and property management. With 540 well-appointed suites, Alta Vista de Boracay is envisioned to become the premier condotel on Boracay Island within the next five years, increasing revenue shares of all stakeholders by becoming known for total value based on unique price and memorable customer service.

Attractive packages

Alta Vista de Boracay is positioned to be a standard "AA" hotel providing attractive value-for-money packages with a reputation of offering competitive incentive programs to its business partners and generating revenue-sharing returns.

The soft-opening of Alta Vista de Boracay is scheduled in December 2007 with two buildings (Jade and Keira), the main pavilion housing the front office, spa and recreational areas. The three-story buildings offer a choice of hilltop or sea-view rooms—all with balconies and a kitchenette inside the rooms. Single-loaded corridors provide privacy, while security is ensured.

WITH THE OPENING of Alta Vista de Boracay, vacations will be translated into daily experiences, in the biggest condotel-residential community in Boracay.

A PERFECT/ B2-3

Makati's newest lifestyle mall

WHOLE NEW WORLD OF SHOPPING convenience and high-end events has now become the centerpiece of Makati Avenue as the newest lifestyle mall finally opens in the heart of the country's busiest commercial district.

Showcasing lifestyle through fashion, dining, entertainment and events, the new mall—which concept won this year's best Asian architectural design award—represents one of the finest examples of subtle modern contemporary design, utilizing geometric forms and simple fine lines to convey a true cosmopolitan ambiance.

A blend of influences

"Antel Land Holdings envisioned the A. Venue Events Mall to be a blend of contemporary and modern influences. Although designed for commercial and lifestyle establishments, it also has an area for events and conventions, the largest ever to be built in Makati," said Renee Funtanilla, Antel marketing and communications manager.

Funtanilla revealed that the commercial complex is a bustling neighborhood mall built with the cosmopolitan family in mind.

The new mall, located next to the soon-to-open A. Venue Hotel and Residences and the new Antel Spa Residences, is part and parcel of the company's approach toward creating the Antel Lifestyle City.

Convenience and leisure

Inside, the ground floor and second floor levels contain a double corridor that will soon be lined with commercial establishments. There will also be an entertainment mall that will fully integrate rows of the hippest fusion restaurants and upscale bars with different entertainment facilities.

At the ground level, the party and event's lifestyle theme becomes immediately apparent with the 1,500-sq-m international standard soundproofed events venue known as the Antel Events Hall. With a seating capacity of 3,000 people, this area plays host to high-end events and trade expos, both local and international alike.

At the second level, a lifestyle of dining can be enjoyed via the generous balconies, which serve as al fresco dining areas for restaurant establishments. Dining aficionados will also enjoy hours of culinary delights at the "Hawkers Center" which will be open until 2 a.m.

The third level of The A. Venue Events Mall highlights shopping lifestyle at its best with exhibit-style stalls or *tiangge* setups favored by bargain shoppers who will soon spend endless fun-filled hours strolling through the shops for valuable finds and great buys.

Color it red

DESIGN DIMENSIONS

Isabel Berenguer Asuncion

I LOVE BLOOD RED. IT HAS A DEPTH AND intensity that is bold and yet does not scream. Compared to a bright red—lipstick red or Ferrari red as I'd call it—blood red has more depth, seemingly more meaning, and carries a certain boldness that is missing from the other brighter and fancier reds.

Red they say is the color of blood and fire, and carries many positive and negative characteristics. War on one side, love on another. Santa on one end, the demon at the other. Traditionally, it is the color of celebration in many cultures. Roman brides were wrapped in fiery red veils which warranted love and fertility.

Symbols of love, fidelity, affinity

Red roses were dedicated to Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter who is the Goddess of love, and her Roman counterpart, Aphrodite. Greek legends presented red roses as symbols of love, fidelity and affinity. Chinese brides wear red wedding gowns and Lai See or red envelopes symbolize and promote prosperity.

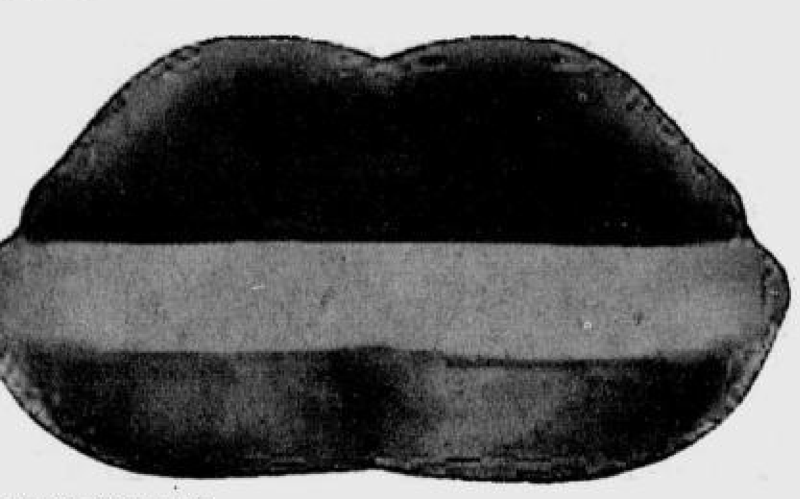
Red, in all its intensity connotes many associations: excitement, anger, intense love, courage and strength. More often, it is associated with heat, power, sexuality and aggression.

Not surprisingly, it is also the color the eye is most sensitive to. It is one of the first three colors infants can see—the other two being black and white—and the first hue that color-blind people perceive as they heal and start to recognize the fullness of the color spectrum.

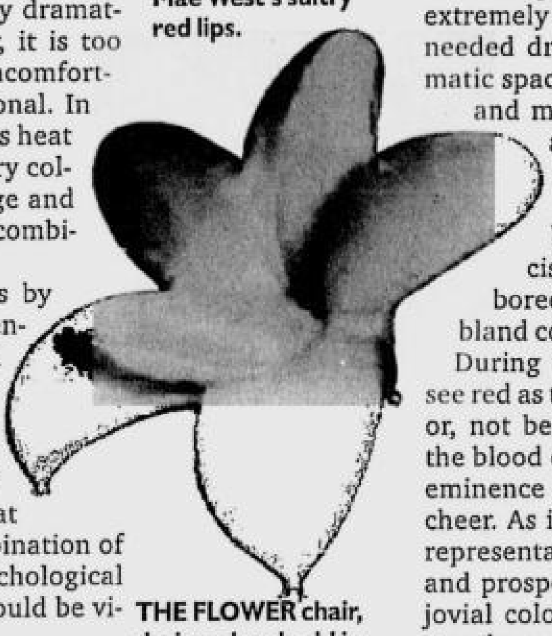
Used to punctuate space

In interior design, red is often perceived as a lively and happy color. Because of its visual power, red is better used to punctuate a space rather than engulf it. A room colored red in its entirety can be very dramatic, but for many, it is too harsh and too uncomfortably confrontational. In our tropical weather, red creates heat and warmth. Mixed with its fiery color spectrum neighbors of orange and yellow, it becomes a scorching combination.

I recall a painting of horses by Salvador Dali: watercolor rendered in hot shades of reds and yellows, it was a blazing depiction of an intense and turbulent charge, where, more than just the horses, the paper itself seemed aflame! On a canvas that is a blank room, the same combination of colors can produce so much psychological heat that staying in too long would be visually unbearable.



THE RED lips sofa, inspired by Salvador Dali's depiction of Mae West's sultry red lips.



THE FLOWER chair, designed and sold in only one color: red.

Touch of boldness, femininity

Used sparingly as accents, red can be extremely stunning and can add much-needed drama to a bland or monochromatic space. On a backdrop of the strong and masculine combination of black and white, red adds a touch of boldness and femininity. Many furniture pieces have been designed to be in red, precisely to interrupt the visual boredom that may come with a bland color palette.

During the Christmas season, we still see red as the predominant Christmas color, not because it originally symbolized the blood of Jesus, but because of its preeminence as a color of celebration and cheer. As in old traditions we revel in its representation of abundance, happiness and prosperity. We feast our eyes on the jovial colors of the season and are constantly reminded of the power and the magic of the color red.

A perfect . . .

From page B2-2

Leaseback program

Unit owners are assured of a place to stay in Boracay anytime of the year. And for those enrolled under the leaseback program, unit owners have the option of using their free room accommodations during peak seasons for two times within the contract period.

With the option to enroll their unit in the leaseback program, they are also able to earn from their investment during those times when they are away. They can expect to receive regular rental revenues as their unit earns for them. They don't have to worry about maintenance, housekeeping and other problems such as repairs since the Brycl Resorts International hotel management team will be attending to these for them.

The hotel services include a 24 hours concierge on call 365 days of the year. Organized activities can be arranged or guests can simply enjoy themselves at the infinity pool and pool bar, restaurants and function room, karaoke and video game rooms or billiards and lounge areas. There is also a recreation space for children, barbecue area, as well as landscaped gardens and pathways for walking.

There is easy access to the private Puka beach as well as a world-class golf course nearby. The hotel's complimentary shuttle service can bring guests down to Boracay's world famous White Beach where they can go for a swim, rent a banca and go island hopping, kite boarding, windsurfing, rowing, snorkeling or ride a paraw. Or for those who'd rather stay dry, they can choose to go hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding or, go shopping at D'Mall or eat in any one of the many specialty restaurants that line the beach. There's never a dull moment in Boracay.

Shifting the energy in your home

By Tess S. Samaniego

FENG SHUI

WHILE THE HOLIdays have kept you busy sprucing your homes with breathtaking decors and wrapping hundreds of gifts, one should remember that the family should remain at the center of all your merry-making.

As they say, to have a family that is loving and supportive at all times is a blessing.

To have a healthy, beautiful and happy environment in which to live with your family is to be blessed twice.

According to feng shui expert Rodika Tchi, to bring more harmony into your family life, one should consider some of these basic feng shui cures that are guaranteed "to shift the energy in your home, balance and harmonize it":

- **Have many happy images of your family throughout the house,** especially in the kitchen, living room and the east area of your house.
- **Keep all rooms in the best possible condition.** Pay special attention to your bedroom, as well as the bedroom of your children.
- **Prefer having a healthy home.** Lower the level of electromagnetic fields in your home and limit the use of harsh and dangerous chemicals.
- **Keep your house clean, open and clutter-free at all times.** This is a must for a healthy and harmonious home. Living in a clutter-free home will bring amazing clarity and heightened energy levels into your life. It will also make space for new and better things to come to you.
- **Use essential oils and crystals to heal and bring harmony and balance to your home.**

Tchi adds that a harmonious home is a place that can accommodate a variety of activities and a variety of people without losing its healing essence. However, creating a place with such power takes time.

The beauty, though, of this creation process is that the more love you put into it, the more love you receive back, she notes.

Tchi suggests not to delay any further and start loving your home now—no matter how it looks at the moment. "It just needs your help to uncover its healing potential."

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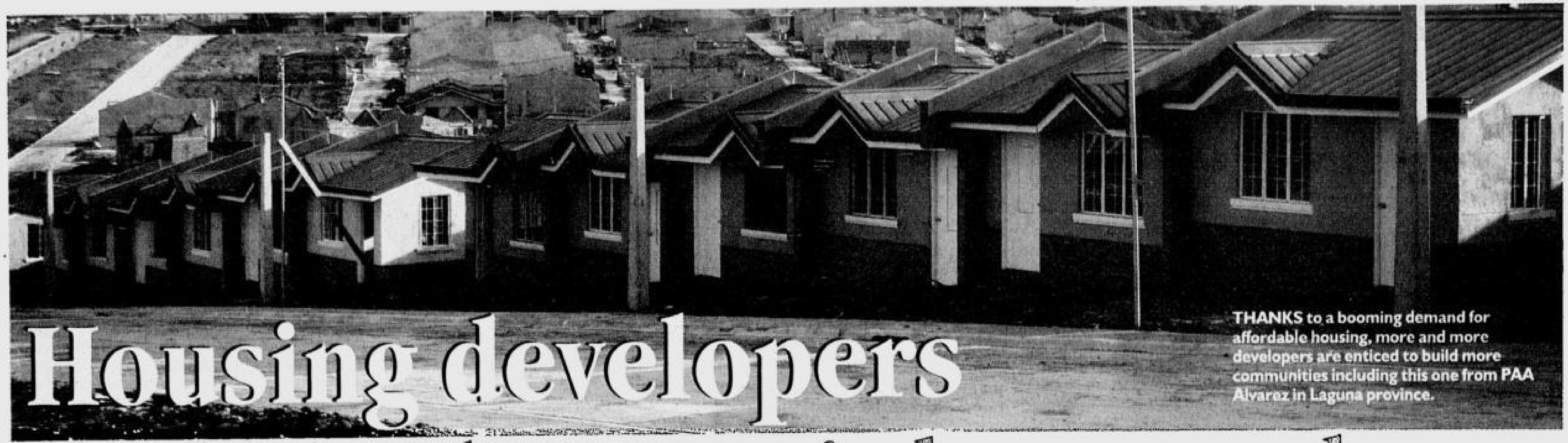


THANKS to a booming demand for affordable housing, more and more developers are enticed to build more communities including this one from PAA Alvarez in Laguna province.

Housing developers satisfied with current industry trends

By Charles E. Buban

FOR THE LARGEST national organization of subdivision and housing developers in the Philippines, the country's housing industry may finally be seeing the light of day.

"The country's housing industry is experiencing impressive growth since the start of 2007, which we had not experienced for quite a long time," noted Roy Calleja, national president of Subdivision and Housing Developers Association Inc.

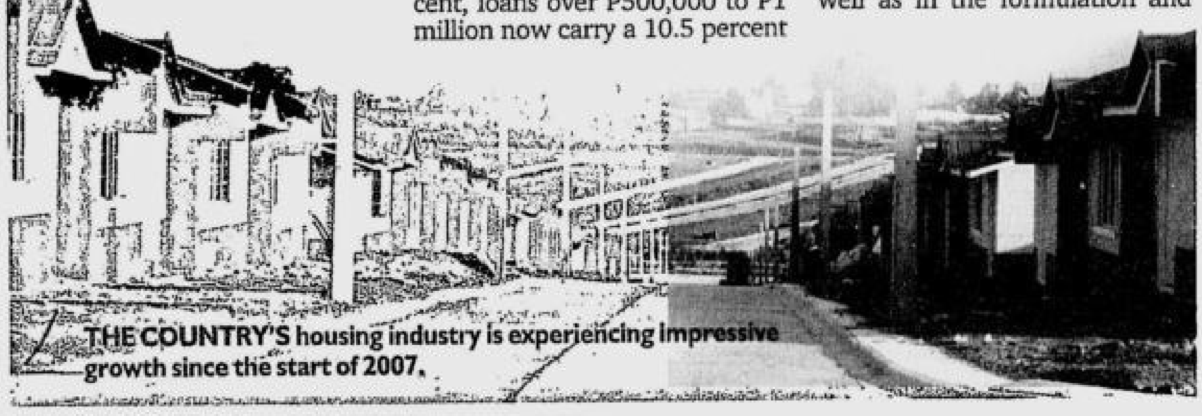
Calleja believes that the country's housing industry may be breaking out from the boom-bust cycle.

Citing a recent Colliers International Philippines Research report, Calleja said things are picking up especially in the low-cost housing segment where licenses approved by the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board for the period from January to June 2007 has reached 25,306 units, a 54 percent increase when compared to to same period last year (16,485 units).

Demand on the rise

"Also, the demand from overseas Filipino workers' families is on the rise considering that a growing portion of the remittances they receive are now going into housing investments. Property developers are increasingly going into housing development projects targeted at this rapidly growing market segment," Calleja reported.

Remittances increased 15.2 percent year on year to $11.9 billion (P495 trillion) in the first 10 months of year, according to a recent Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas data adding that OFWs were encouraged to send funds at home due to enhanced and expanded financial services and products of banks and non-bank channels.



THE COUNTRY'S housing industry is experiencing impressive growth since the start of 2007.

More conducive

Calleja also said conditions here are now more conducive to more homebuyers, thanks to several housing rules and regulations that SHDA helped propose and push before concerned agencies.

"As a result, Pag-Ibig reduced in 2006 their interest rates to six percent to make housing loans more affordable to low-income families. With the reduction, loan packages up to P300,000 have an interest rate of 6 percent, down from 9 percent," Calleja said.

"The interest rate for loan packages between P300,000 to P500,000 dropped to 7 percent from 10 percent. From 11 percent, loans over P500,000 to P1 million now carry a 10.5 percent interest while those for loan packages of P1 million to P2 million will be lowered to 11.5 percent from 12 percent," he said.

Calleja also added that repayment period for loans up to P750,000 has also been stretched to 30 years, compared to the 20-year maximum under old guidelines for loans exceeding P500,000.

Consultative body

"Indeed, SHDA has been acting as a consultative body to the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council policymaking body. As such, it gives feedback and inputs from the housing industry practitioners which serve as basis for proposed policy changes, procedures as well as in the formulation and promulgation of executive orders and memorandum circulars," Calleja explained.

Executive Order 45 is one example of this coordination.

This law prescribes specific period for a government agency and the local government units to act on applications for certifications, clearances and permits for housing projects (i.e. subdivisions or condominiums) and provides an option for the applicant-developer where the government agency or LGU refuses or fails to dispose of an application for said applied for housing permit.

"It is important that national organizations such as SHDA, to be in the forefront in dealing with issues and coordinate them with concerned government agencies and allied industries. This promotes and safeguards not only the interest of our members but also the public as well," Calleja said.

At the moment, he said that SHDA is closely monitoring proposed bills in the Senate including the one that seeks to establish a socialized and low-cost housing loan restructuring program; and another, which seeks to promulgate a Magna Carta for homeowners association.

"SHDA is currently a member of the technical working group deliberating on these bills prior to their enactment," Calleja informed.

Representations

He also said that aside from government agencies, SHDA has also coordinated with private sectors particularly manufacturers on the issue of spiraling cost of construction materials.

With regard to the reduction of cement price, Calleja reported that SHDA has coordinated with key officers of the country's three major cement manufacturers—Holcim, LaFarge and Cemex.

In this connection, SHDA instructed its member-developers to submit a conservative estimate of their cement requirements for a year which they can commit to so that an agreement could be reached with these manufacturers.

"We are confident that with the active support and participation of all our members in dealing with our partners whether in the government or private sectors, the coming year will be a continuation of this positive developments that the housing sector has enjoyed in 2007," Calleja said.

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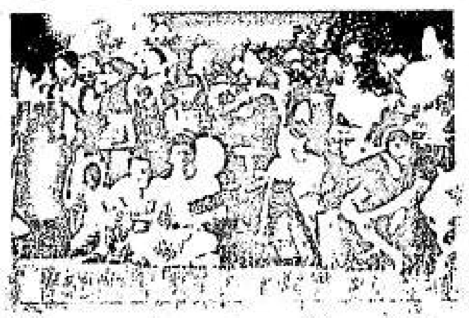
Greenpeace on Earth

Heavenly creatures

by Juana Manahan

Don your gay apparel

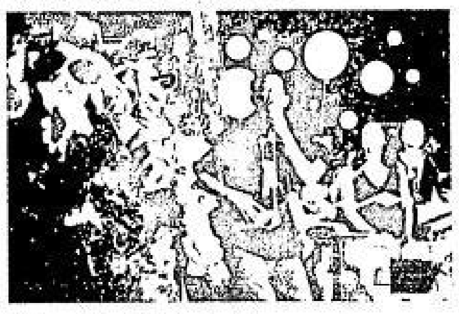
by Tals Diaz



Feasts on Earth

Do you hear what I hear

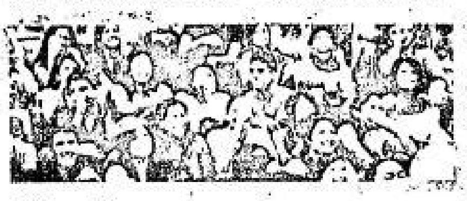
by James Gabrillo



Let it glow

Jingle bell rocks

by Katrina Holigores



Cajun corner

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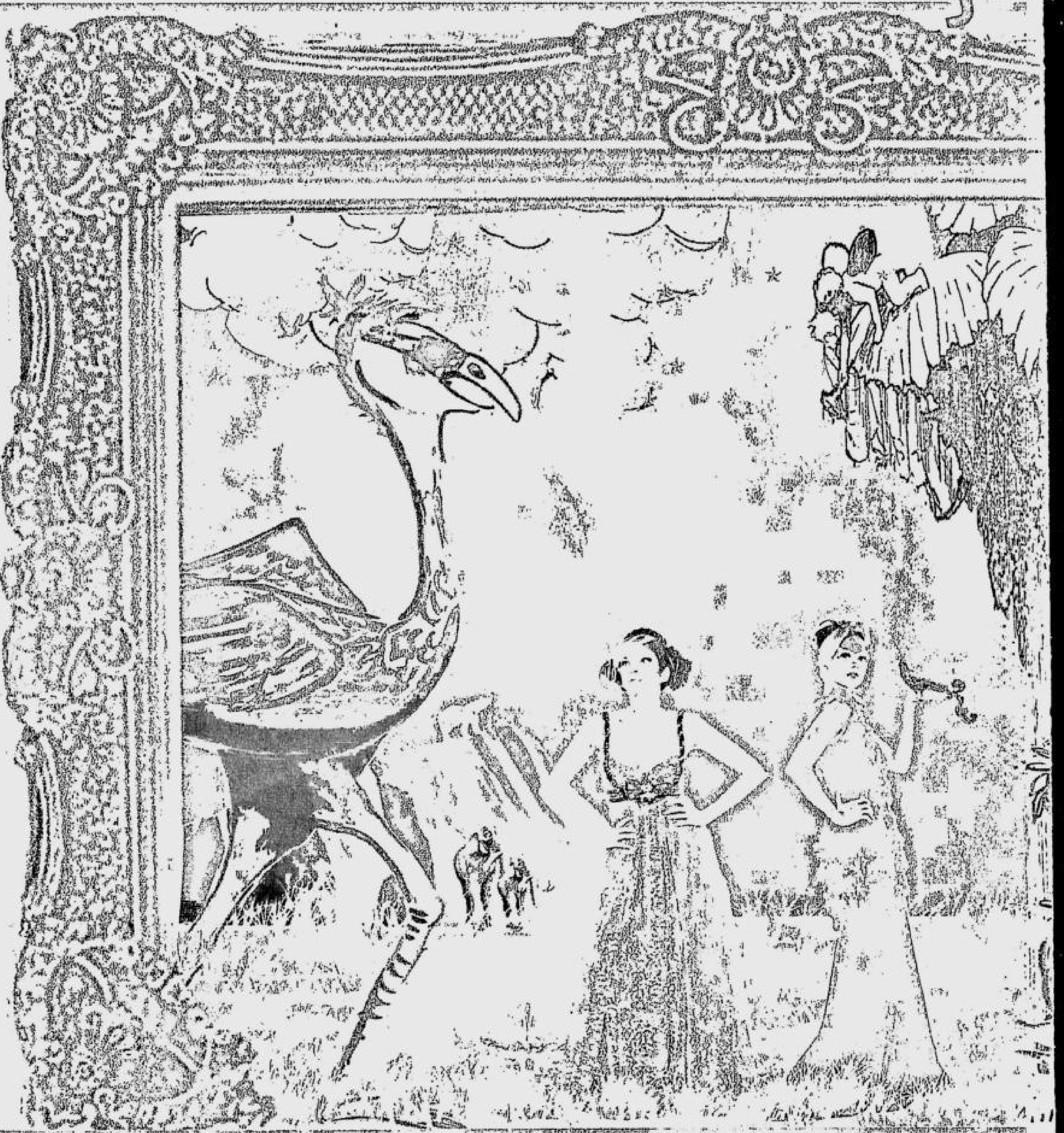
GREENPEACE

JUDDHA Paolo is the perfect Greenpeace volunteer.



Earth Angels

MODELS: AMINA ARANAZ, AMANDA GRIFFIN
LOURD RAMOS FOR EMPHASIS,
MAKE UP BY AL DE LEON AND LIZETTE FOR
SMASHBOX BEYOND BEAUTY,
HAIR BY ZARINA AND MALIA FOR BEDHEAD;
THE ACADEMY OF BEAUTY AND ARTS
GOWNS BY JOEL ESCOBER
ART BY LILIANNA MANAHAN

It's easy to go green and dream of a white Christmas

Text and styling by Juana Manahan

THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE change are more visible now than in the past years. It affects every living thing on the planet and could cause everything from the extinction of beautiful animals to the wacky weather we have recently experienced. The past year has seen a lot of movement in the area of the environment, from the huge success of An Inconvenient Truth, to the DiCaprio backed Eleventh Hour, it seems that everyone has gone green. Sad to say that the beautiful Christmas lights that wrap Ayala Avenue aren't exactly energy efficient, we at Super have tied up with Greenpeace to raise awareness so that everyone can do their little bit to save the planet and for all of us to have a Green Christmas.

Far from the headline-grabbing tactics of the Rainbow warrior and their crew, Greenpeace Philippines has launched campaigns that everyone can participate in. The Simple Lang campaign tries to remind Filipinos that everyone can do a little something to help the environment. Unplug appliances when they aren't being used, hang clothes instead of using the drier. Celebrity spokespersons from Greenpeace share what they have been doing for this great cause.

Bag designer, model, mother Amina Aranaz is helping the environment in her own glamorous way. The latest addition to her glitzy collection of bags is an environmentally friendly shopper bag. The "I'm A Natural Shopper" bag encourages shopaholics to nix the plastic bags given away at stores and put them straight into the handy spacious tote. The bags cost P750 at Aranaz stores, P200 of it will be donated to Greenpeace. Who needs all that plastic to get to the good stuff anyway!

Energy is one of the most important factors that affect climate change. The burning of fossil fuels and the soon to be lack of it is a big concern. Finding other ways to create and renew energy is one major cause for Greenpeace. The energetic Juddha Paolo is the perfect volunteer to support Greenpeace's energy-related campaigns. He has volunteered in several of the organization's campaigns, mostly with the Climate and Energy campaign. To help promote the renewable energy bill, he helped install a solar panel at the Apo Island Elementary School library in Dumaguete last year.

GREENPEACE

AMANDA Griffin is an avid supporter and animal lover.

Genetically modified organisms (GMO) are chemicals released on fields to enhance and produce crops. Greenpeace maintains that this is harmful to human health and the environment and the effects are irreversible.

Amanda Griffin has been supporting Greenpeace since 2005. Most recently she, together with Teresa Licaros and Angel Aquino have been leading the petitions against the application of Bayer's GMO rice.

From all of us at Super have a Green Christmas!

To get involved and learn more about Greenpeace and their projects, visit www.greenpeace.org.ph

Enjoy Christmas Shopping C
AYALA MALLS extends shoppin
Until 12 midnight on Dec. 21 to

The Dahon Program: Helping turn a new leaf

The ready to go meal in a banana leaf made famous by nationwide food chain Binalot is an integral part in greening the environment and aiding in the livelihood growth of the country

THE DAHON PROGRAM OR THE DANGAL At Hanapbuhay para sa Nayon is Binalot's program to help the impoverished banana farmers of Southern Tagalog. Since its inception, the program has helped a community of farmers and their families improve their livelihood and more importantly, their lives. In the long run, it aims to develop the community itself and provide other livelihood programs to help them turn a new leaf that has less dependence on the banana leaf itself.

The Banana Farmers' Plight:

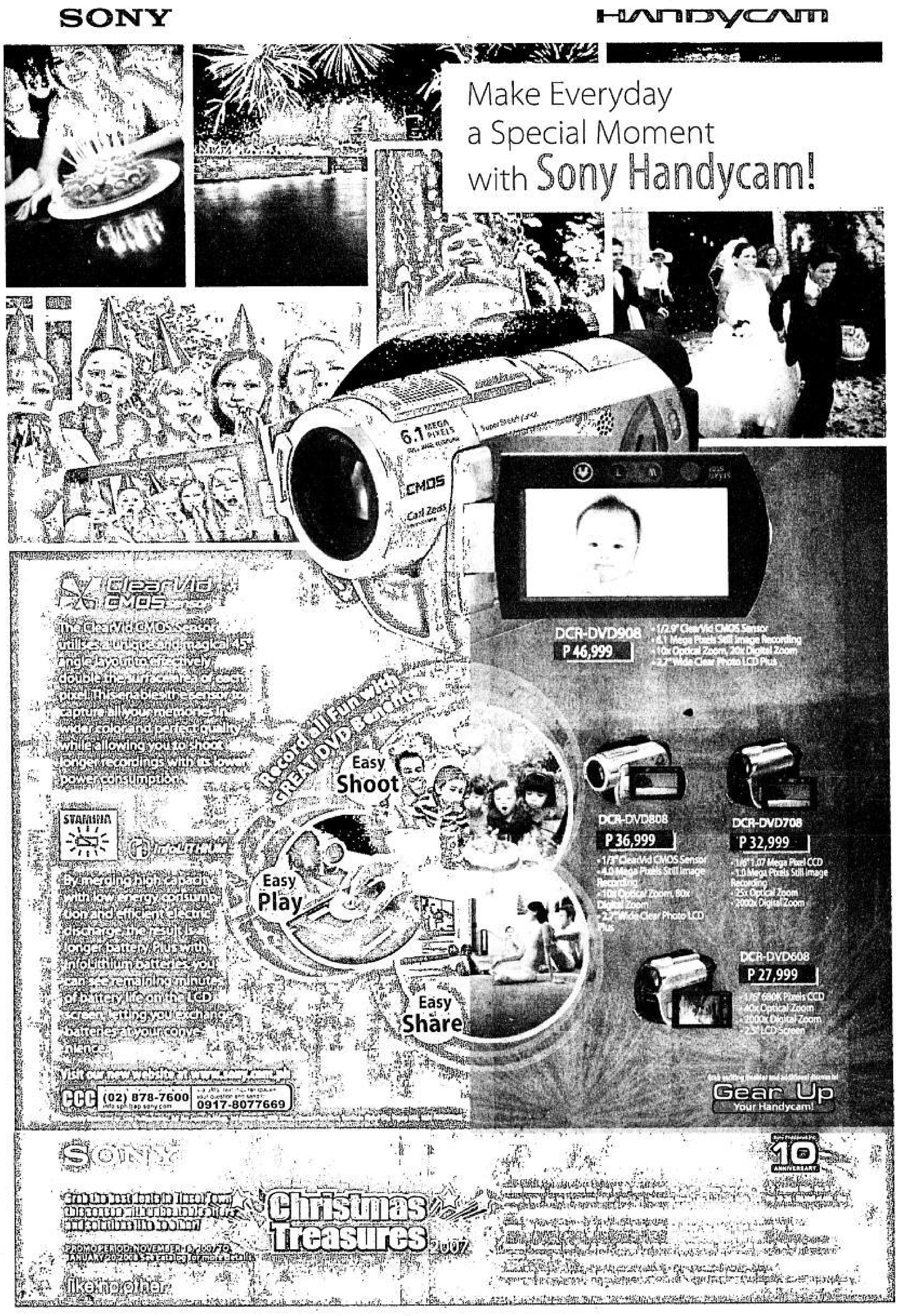
The banana is the primary source of income to this community of impoverished farmers. For a whole day's work harvesting bananas and its leaves, they earn just enough for the basic necessities of life.

The Dahon Program helps the farmers by buying banana leaves from them directly at a premium, thus maximizing their income. Under the program, the farmers harvest the leaves and with their families, clean and cut them. Binalot then buys the leaves from the farmers per piece.

Greening the environment

The program not only provides livelihood but also helps the environment. Every year, millions of tons of non-biodegradable wastes are produced in Metro Manila alone. By promoting the use of banana leaves as packaging, Binalot and Dahon try to do their share in helping conserve the environment.

To find out more call Dahon Foundation at 821-0509 or e-mail binalotdahon@gmail.com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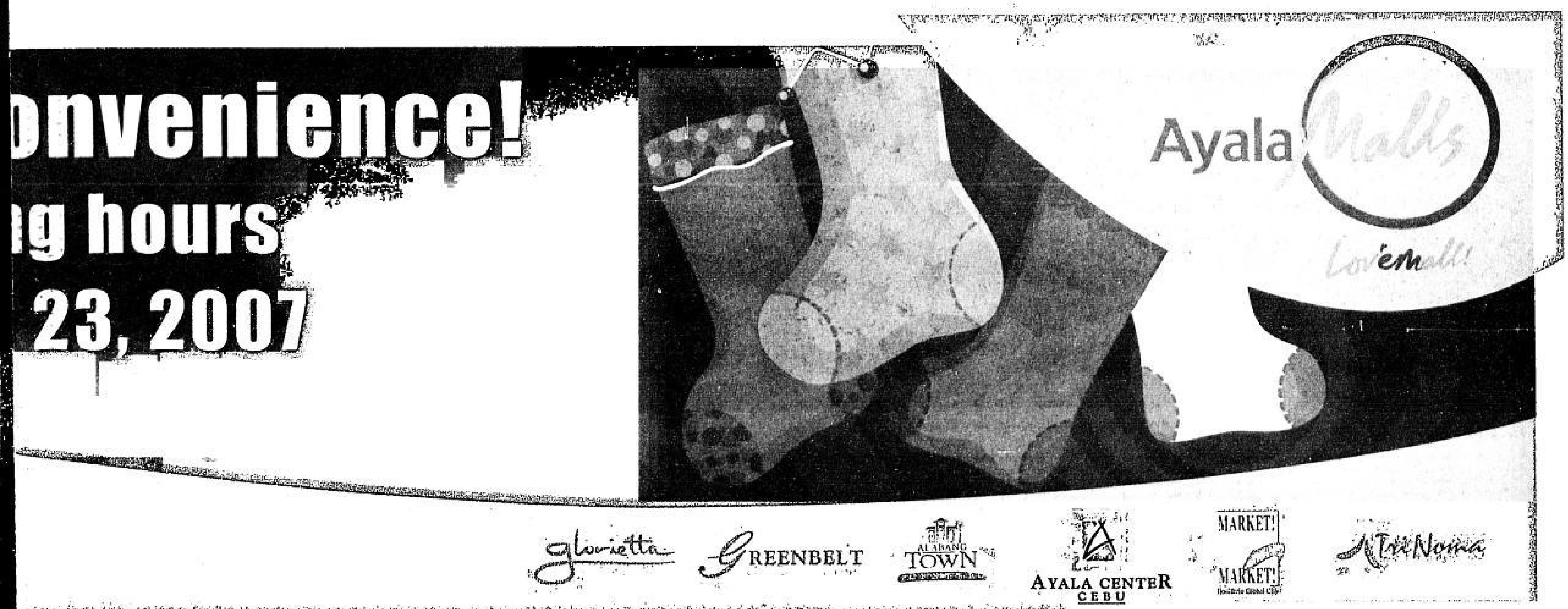
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A Charmed Life

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Text and photos
by Katrina A. Holigores

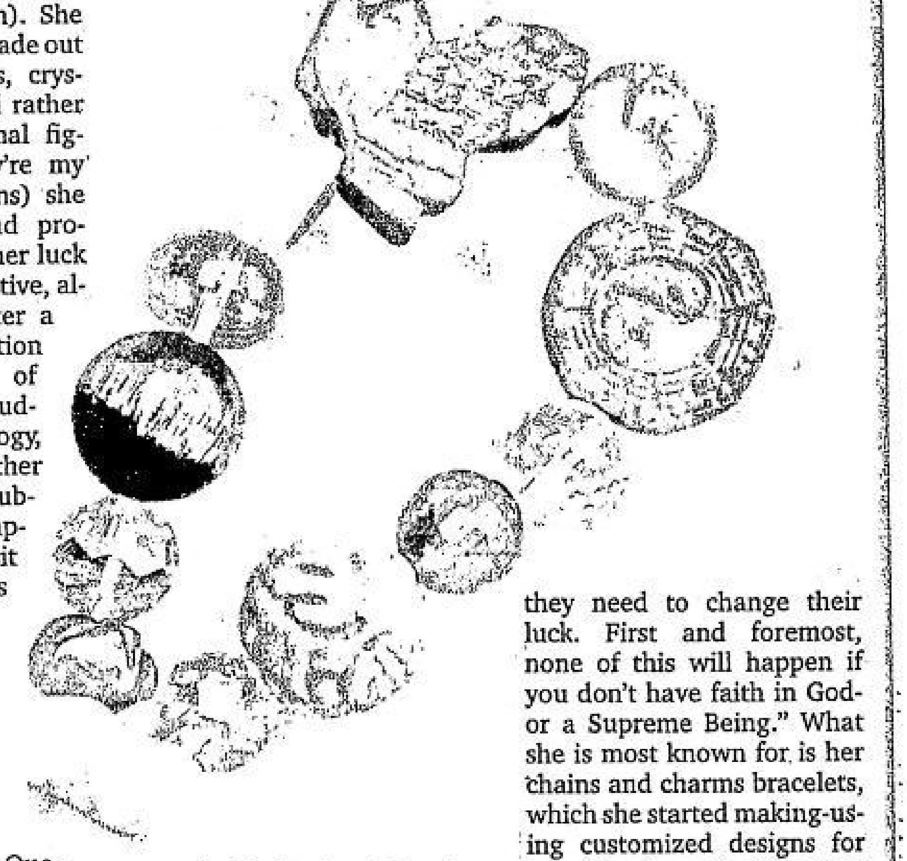
A NEW YEAR IS APproaching and a lot of internal and external spring cleaning is in order.

The "industry" of new age, or eastern as opposed to western philosophies have been on the rise in recent years, regardless of the fact that the belief in most of the practices have existed for centuries. Recently, I have picked up an interest in feng shui, which is not an uncommon word nowadays and when Wikipedia-d means "wind-water" (literally) and when described it is the ancient Chinese practice of placement and arrangement of space to achieve harmony with the environment. Curiosity got the best of me even more when a friend came over one day accompanied what may best be described as a jingly-jangly sound (and no she wasn't on Santa's sleigh). She was wearing bracelets made out of semi-precious stones, crystals and some even had rather peculiar, mythical animal figurines on them. "They're my '*anting-anting*' (talismans) she gleefully exclaimed and proceeded to tell me how her luck had taken a rather positive, almost divine turn after a feng shui consultation and acquisition of bracelets. Having studied western astrology, the enneagram and other (ok weird) similar subjects, I made an appointment to visit Chains and Charms proprietor, Joy Lim, who had been (I later found out) practicing her feng shui craft for almost eight years.

DON'T STEAL me lucky charms.

Waiting auspiciously

Getting to Joy Lim's Quezon city office (although she has other branches peppered all over GMA) was a rather complicated adventure for my Makati spoiled being, but, I got there and "prepared" myself for what would be the outcome. Perhaps I've just watched one too many movies that depict these geomancers or feng shui practitioners as aging, grumpy, wild-eyed soothsayers so I was really trying to hold my rather wild imagination at bay. I was though, surrounded by as many Buddha figurines, chimes, dragons, red and gold as far as the eye could see, which was amusing. "She has never renovated or changed this place," explained Vangie Kua, her publicist and longtime friend. "It is where she found her first success." As I looked around and took in walls that needed a paint job and floors that needed some loving I figured that there may be truth in "Don't fix what isn't broken" as this is a woman who sometimes has a waiting list of clients for weeks, even months and people are willing to wait hours for their appointment. Thankfully, my wait wasn't very long and it was certainly worth it because when Joy Lim breezed in my grumpy-lady-with-too-much-black-eyeliner notions were dispelled. I was greeted with a woman of vibrant, warm and happy energy and found my own energy buoyed as I was ushered into an extension of the building that was her current office.



A different kind of bling

A tip: you need to come equipped with your birth details and from there, your Chinese Zodiac animal is identified and what number or "star" corresponds to you. Things may get a little technical at this point, but you are shown charts, photos and you can ask a barrage of questions.

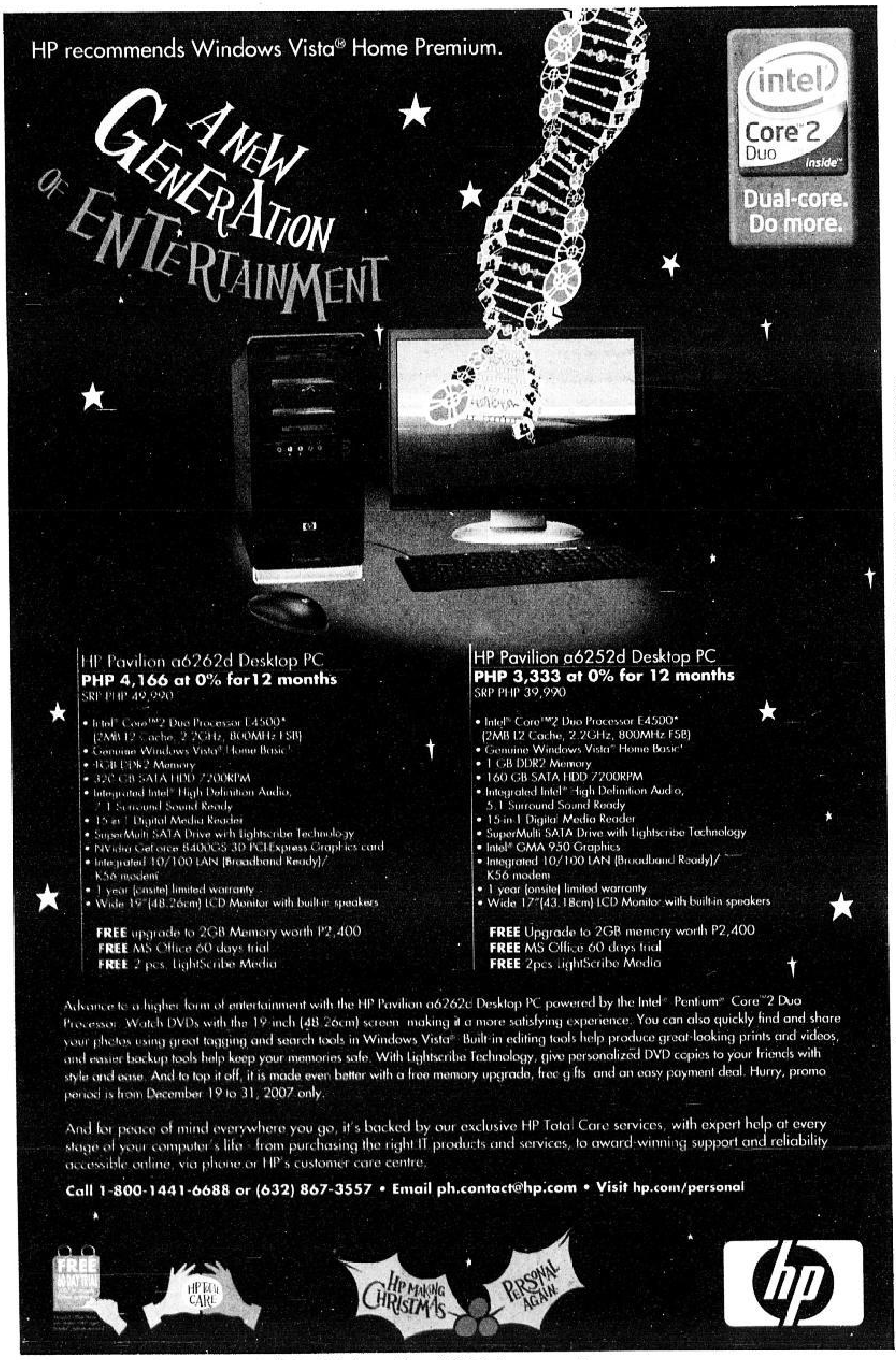
"It was my grandfather who used to practice feng shui," confides Joy. "I would just know about it as a hobby, the only time I started believing in it was when my first business failed. When I started applying proper feng shui techniques—things changed and since then I've been a convert, but always with the intention to help others by providing them with what they need to change their luck. First and foremost, none of this will happen if you don't have faith in God or a Supreme Being." What she is most known for is her chains and charms bracelets, which she started making using customized designs for her friends, and when they started to tell her that things were also changing for the better, she decided to go into it full-time. "The bracelets are like portable auspicious items that you can take with you—they help with personal energy and then I can recommend other things for the energy of your house." Depending on your life concern at the time is what she will base what kind of bracelet to create for you. All her creations are made out of crystals and semi-precious stones and even the figurines she attaches are made of the same material. Rose quartz for example is good for attracting love and relationships, yellow citrine for money and success, a crystal sculpted golden rooster may be attached to a bracelet to attract your peach blossom luck in that particular area, or you may benefit from bracelets that have the "heavenly" DZI Tibetan charm. (Rumored to have fallen from heaven and what is used by Tibetan monks) The bracelets, at the very least can make you feel more positive and if you are still unsure of what your concerns are there is always the Blessed Lucky Animal Sign Charm Bracelet. It is unique to the wearer and is created according to your sign, and carries with it blessings from heaven—this was her very first creation and technically her "best-seller."

Luck be a lady

So, as I ended my session and walked away—jingling jangling all the way—armed with my new bands of luck and power (Wonder Woman would not have stood a chance) I couldn't help but think that at the very least, I made a new friend, had some new accessories that would certainly be conversation starters and hey, if 2008 turns out to be bigger, brighter and better due to my wrist warriors then I would definitely be a very happy feng shui follower for life.

For information or to make an appointment: call Charms and Crystals at 742-2597. Or check out www.charmsandcrystals.com

BLING on the luck



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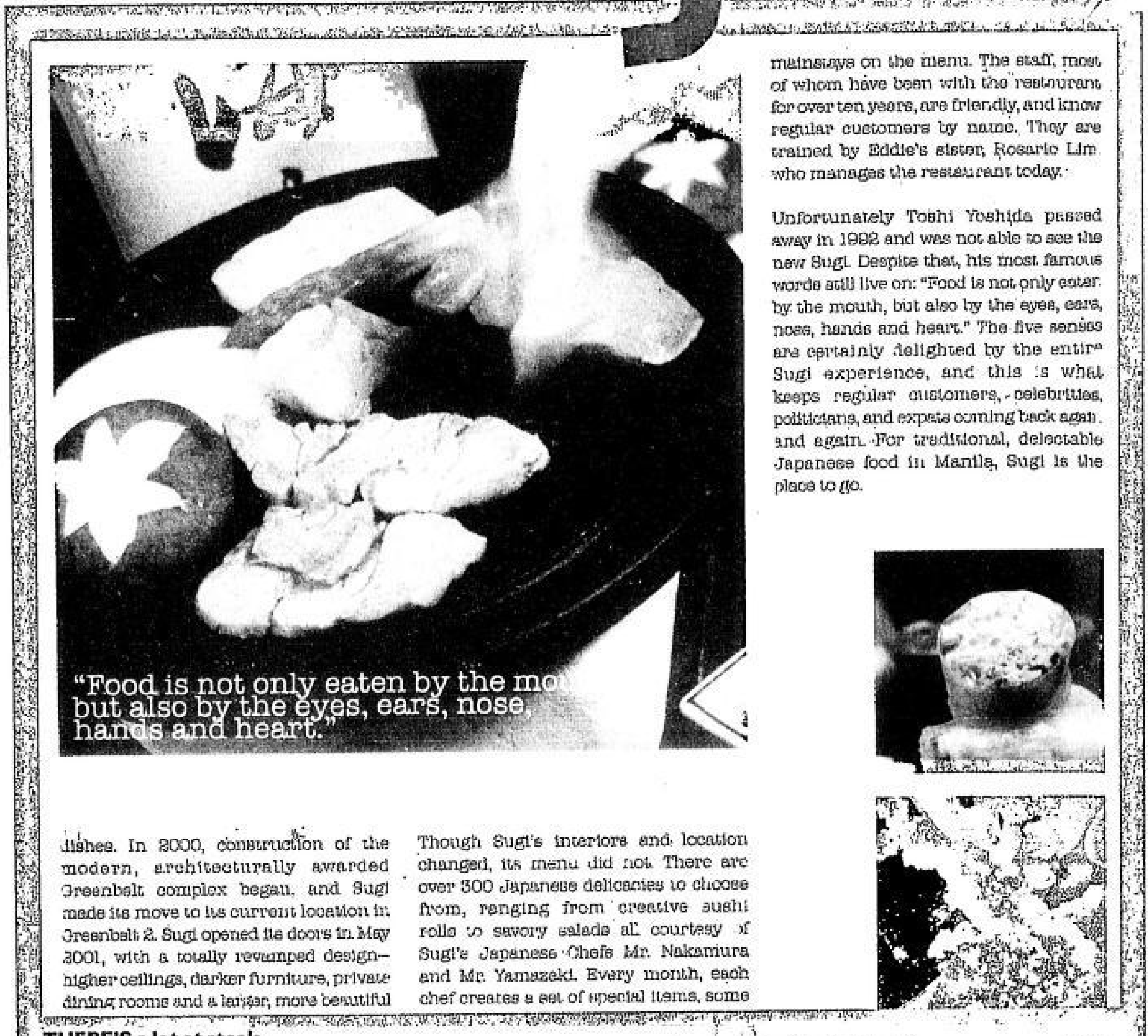

mainstays on the menu. The staff, most of whom have been with the restaurant for over ten years, are friendly, and know regular customers by name. They are trained by Eddie's sister, Rosario Lim who manages the restaurant today.

Unfortunately Toshi Yoshida passed away in 1992 and was not able to see the new Sugi. Despite that, his most famous words still live on: "Food is not only eaten by the mouth, but also by the eyes, ears, nose, hands and heart." The five senses are certainly delighted by the entire Sugi experience, and this is what keeps regular customers, celebrities, politicians, and expats coming back again and again. For traditional, delectable Japanese food in Manila, Sugi is the place to go.

"Food is not only eaten by the mo
but also by the eyes, ears, nose,
hands and heart."

dishes. In 2000, construction of the modern, architecturally awarded Greenbelt complex began, and Sugi made its move to its current location in Greenbelt 2. Sugi opened its doors in May 2001, with a totally revamped design—higher ceilings, darker furniture, private dining rooms and a larger, more beautiful

Though Sugi's interiors and location changed, its menu did not. There are over 300 Japanese delicacies to choose from, ranging from creative sushi rolls to savory salads all courtesy of Sugi's Japanese Chefs Mr. Nakamura and Mr. Yamazaki. Every month, each chef creates a set of special items, some

THERE'S a lot at steak.

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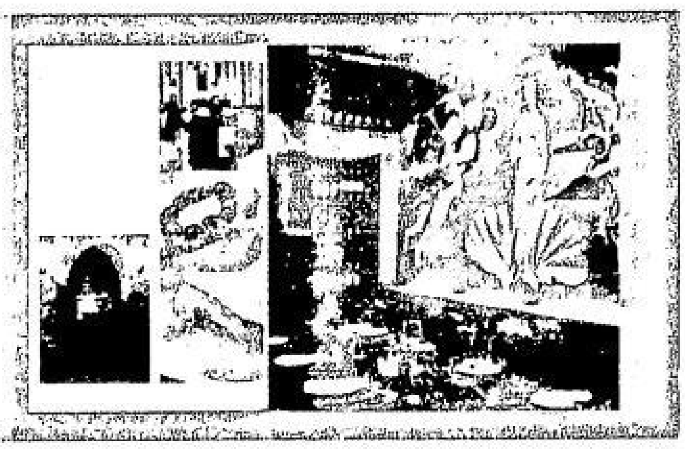

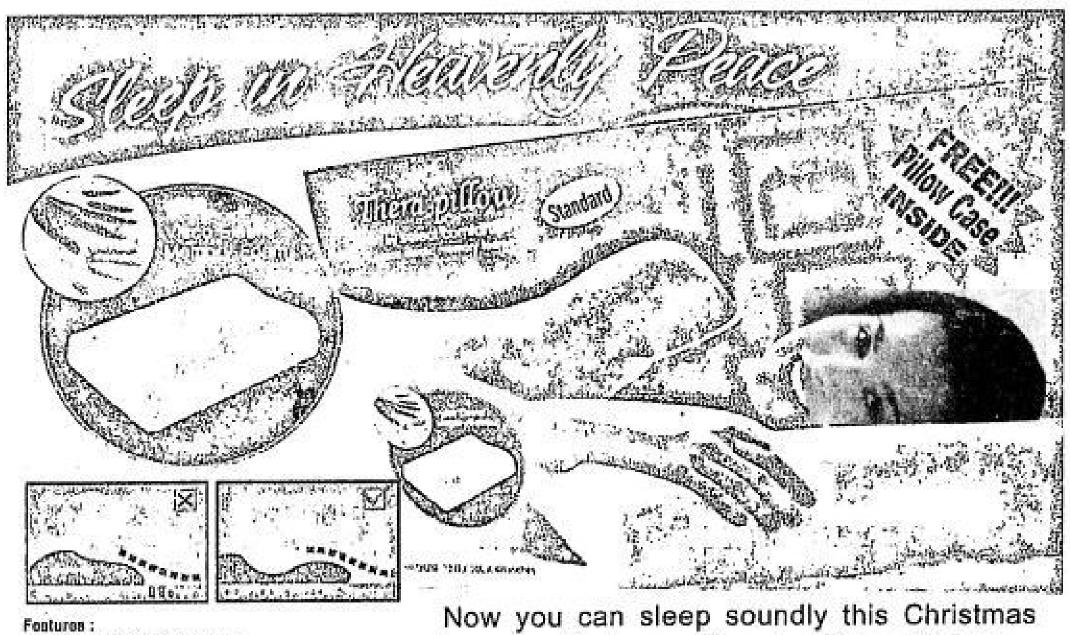

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The Best Kept Secret is Out

OUT THE WINDOW

Tals Diaz

CALLING ALL FOODies—chew on these factual morsels. Did you know that King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia of Spain once dined at Alba's Spanish restaurant? Or that the owner of Zong Restaurant at The Fort once performed in Broadway? Or that Hossein of Hossein's Persian Kebab used to be a lifeguard and bodybuilder by the Caspian Sea?

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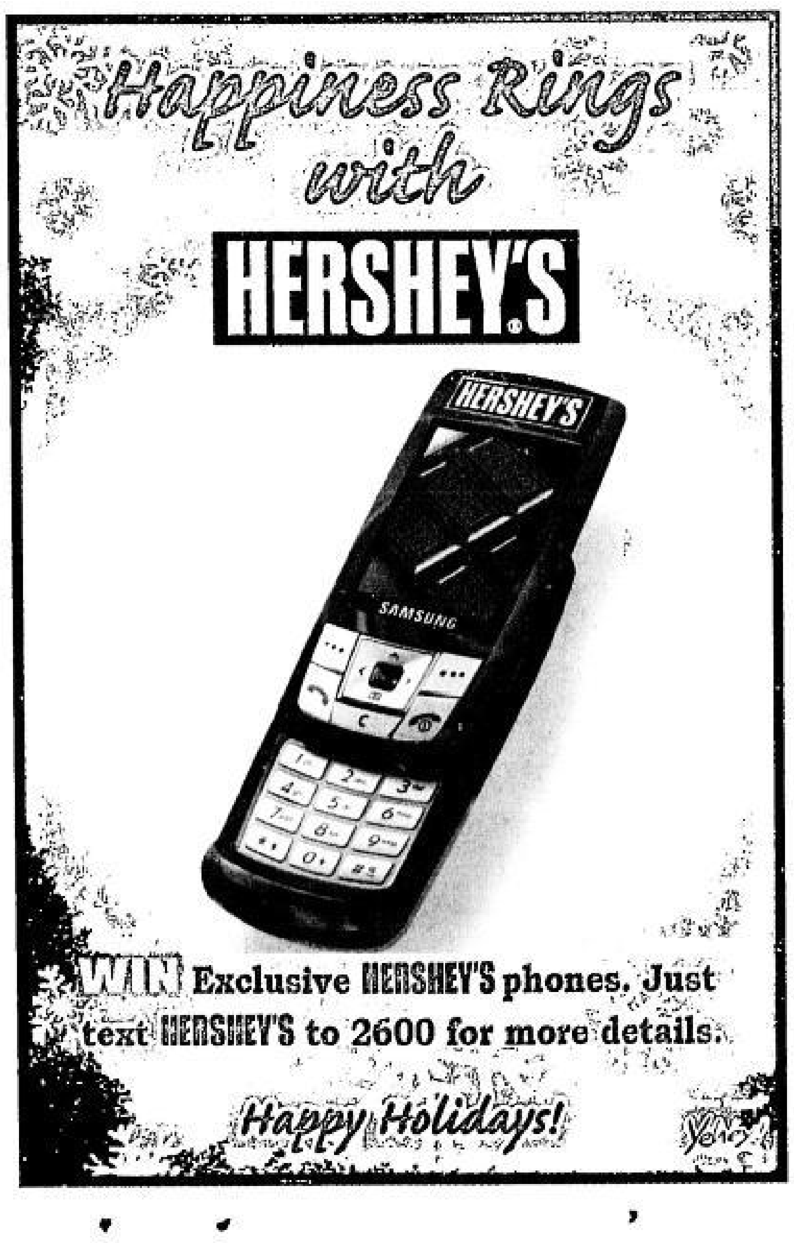
Spilling the secrets are cuisinary visionaries Ines Cabarrus and Elian Habayeb, who describe themselves as "two intrepid explorers always in search of the perfect dining experience." Ines, acknowledged as one of the country's experts on wine and beverage, sits on the board of Enderun Colleges teaching Beverage Management and Wine Appreciation. Elian on the other hand is an urban hyphenate, a certified public ac-

CULINARY COUPLE. Elian Habayeb and Ines Cabarrus, the authors spilling the secrets

THE BEST/ D2



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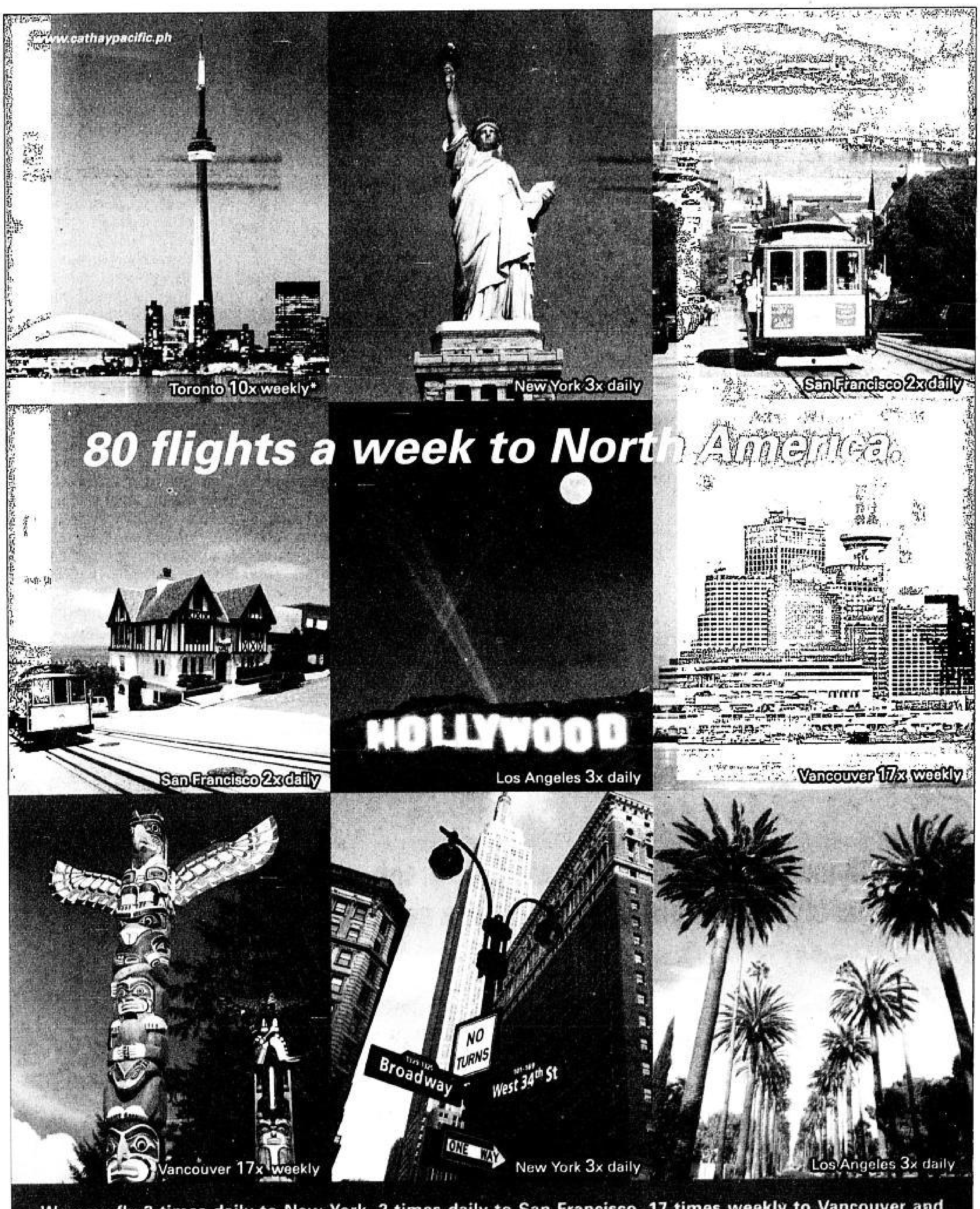

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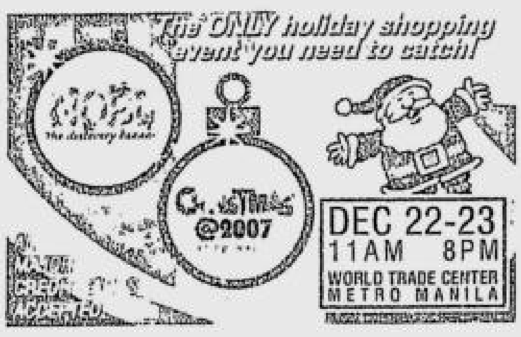
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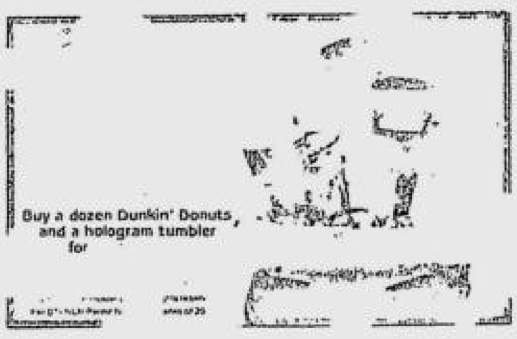
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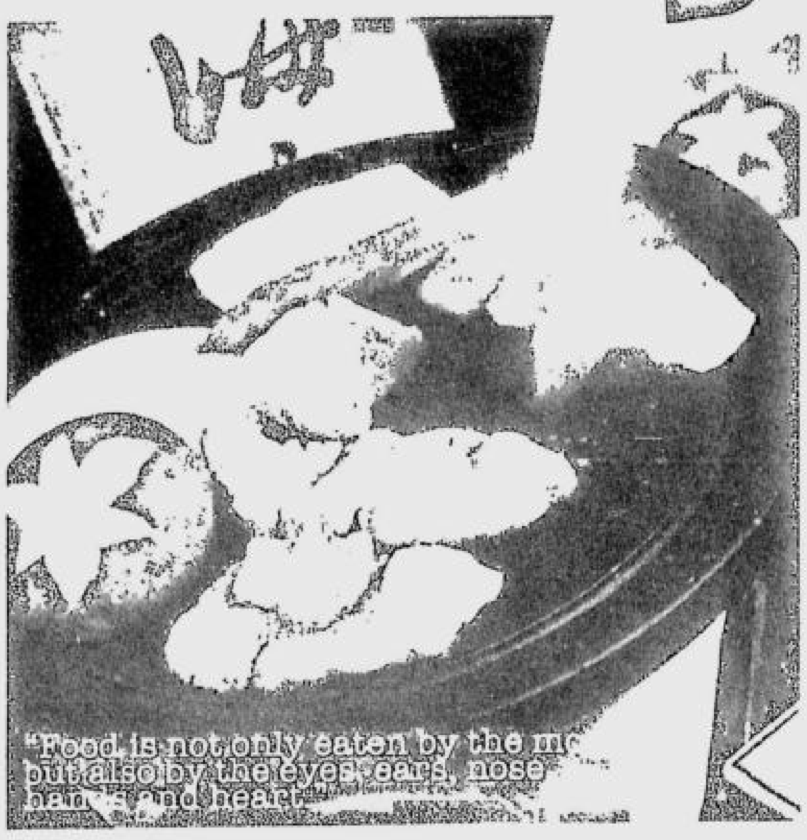
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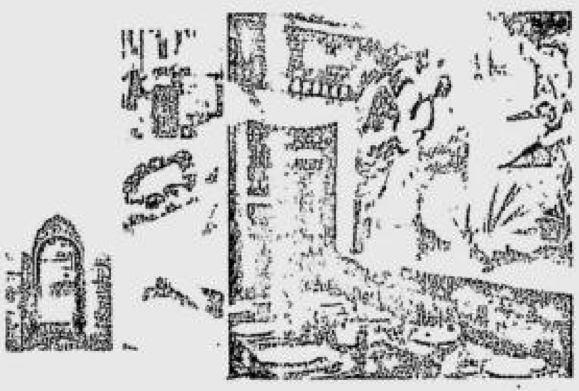
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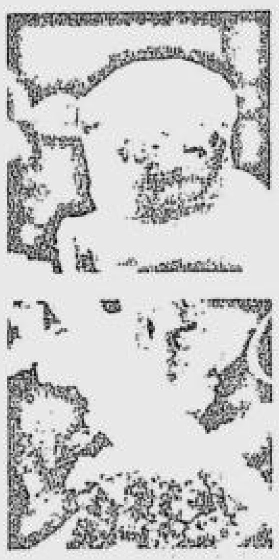

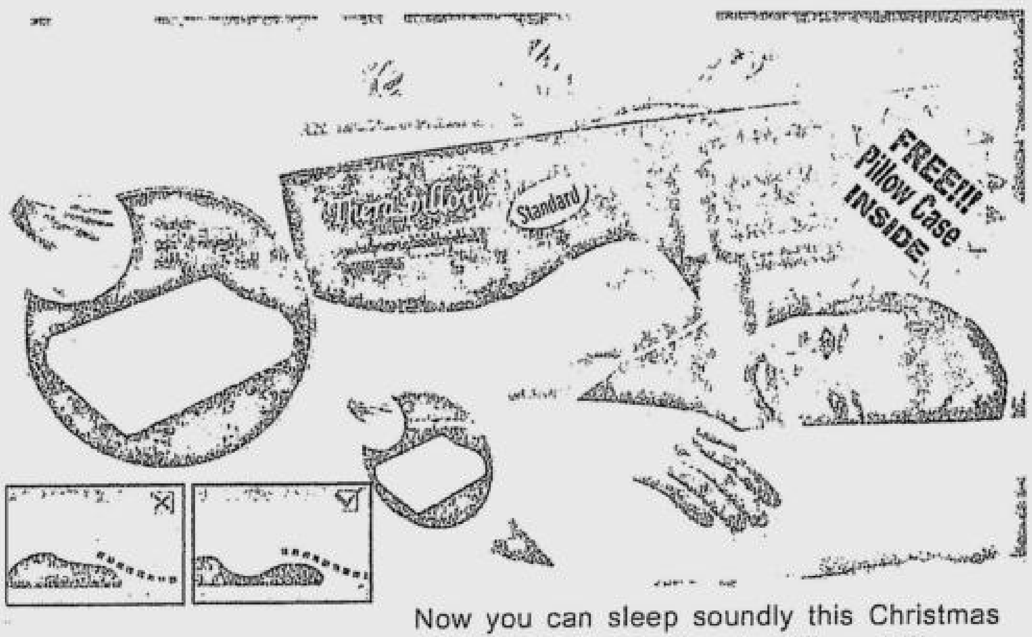
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OUT THE WINDOW
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CULINARY COUPLE. Elian Habayeb and Ines Cabarrus, the authors spilling the secrets

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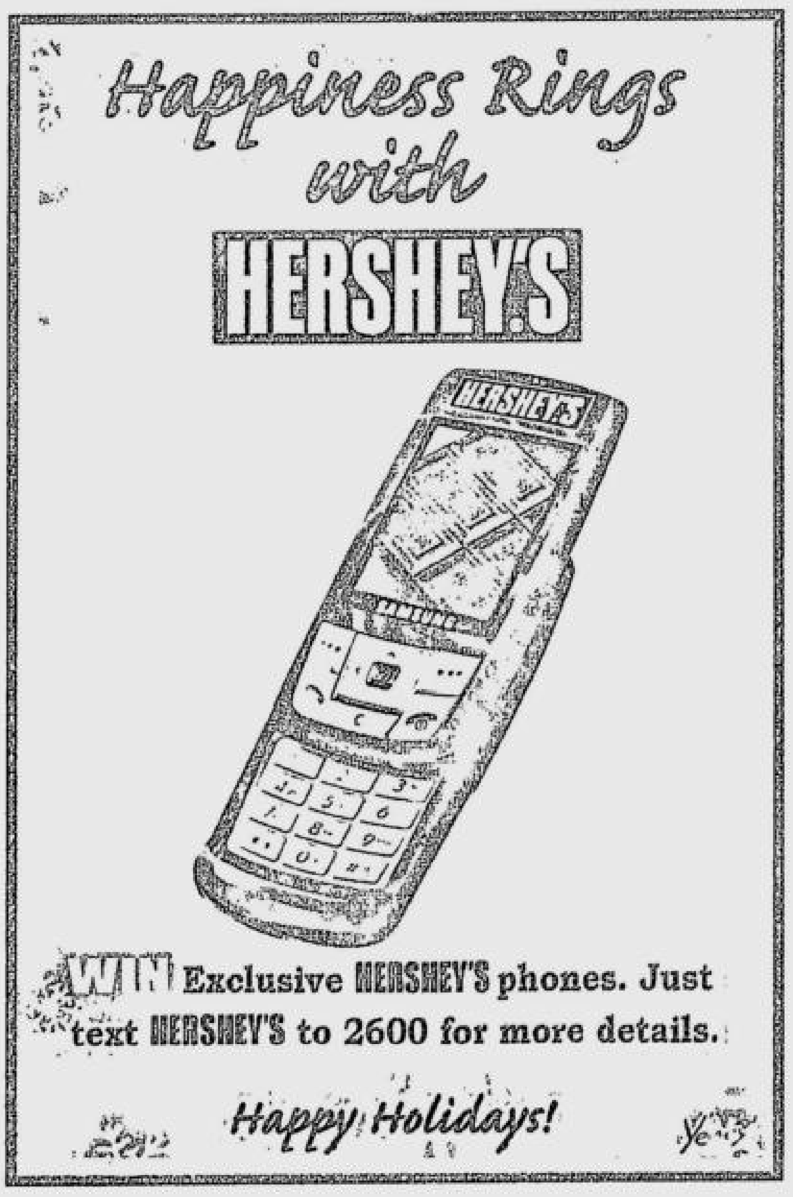
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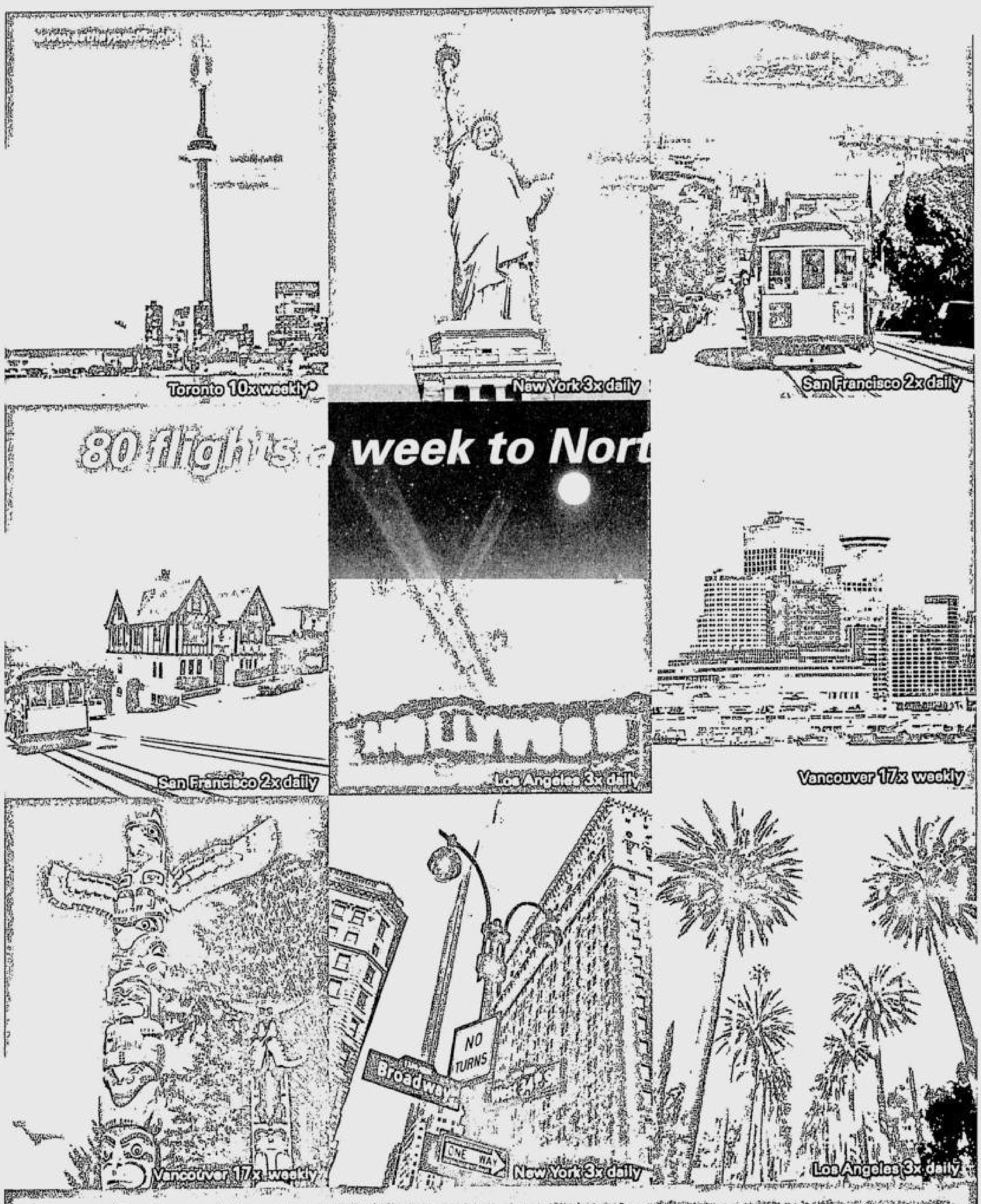
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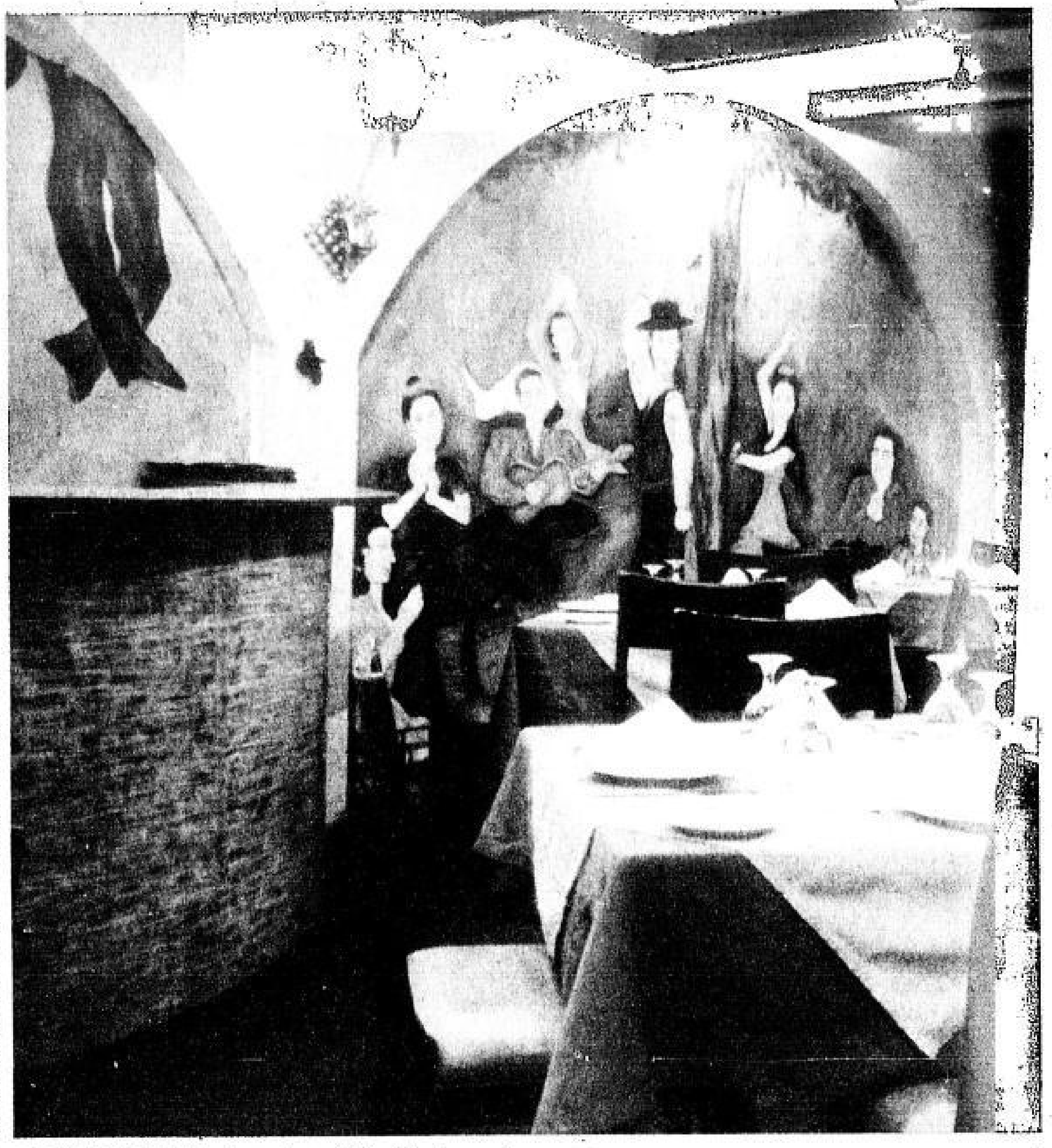


SPANISH RULE. The interiors of Alba Restaurante

ANCIENT WONDER. Ziggurat off Burgos Street

The Best Kept Secret is Out

From page D1

countant with two MBAs, known more among the city's night owls as an events organizer and DJ who has manned the decks in Manila, New York and San Francisco. The couple first conceived the idea while dining in a tiny, restaurant on the outskirts of Manila. "We were in a small unknown restaurant called Amoroma in Alabang," shares Ines. "Authentic Italian cuisine, great service—but believe it or not, there were only six tables! The place is always packed, and so we asked ourselves why no one knew about this place, and how can we share our experience with others and let them know that such a place exists. Someone should write a book..." A couple more glasses of wine later, and the idea was born.

DINNER FOR TWO. Clu Alvarez and Yesu Cabarrus

FOODFELLAS. Mark Jentes and author Elian Habayeb

"Manila's Best Kept Restaurant Secrets" is a visual smorgasbord of luscious photography by Edward Simon and delicious tales behind the best restos in town. I'd say the "best" part of all this is that it doesn't just feature the usual suspects if you were to do a "Best Of" list—La Tienda, Café Ysabel, Chef Laudico's Bistro Filipino, Lopera, Di'Mark's and (my current Filipino favorite) Abé, the book also serves up stories of off-the-beaten track treasures that are known only to the more adventurous foodies. Savor the pages about Manos Greek Taverna in Tagaytay, Ziggurat, Sonya's Secret Garden and (my favorite hole-in-the-wall Thai restaurant everrr) Som's.

In between courses, I caught up with Miss Cabarrus who gave the dish on Manila's best. *Bon appetit!*

BUFFET OF BOOKS. At the launch held at Topshelf, Fully Booked High Street

Have you always been a foodie?

I think I was a foodie from day one. I have always enjoyed great food and good dining experiences. Also, my career path speaks for itself in the sense that as a sommelier, one must always be in tune with the latest food trends as the true pleasure of wine is really brought out when paired with the right food. I pride myself in being able to often choose the right wine for the right cuisine.

There's a reality show, "Foodie Call," which is based on the premise that the best way to someone's heart is through the stomach. Does your love for food spice up your relationship?

I would say definitely yes. There is nothing like being with Elian in a great restaurant sipping on a fine glass of wine and munching on fabulous food. It's romantic, adventurous and decadent all at the same time!

Do you both cook?

Both Elian and I love to cook. We spend weekends on our own experimenting with different types of dishes, each one always trying to "up" the other with their creations. Lately we have been doing a lot of seafood—it's Elian's baked parmesan crusted sole up against my chorizo seafood soup at the moment! Both are absolutely delicious! And healthy.

What are your personal favorite restaurants in the book?

Of course Amoroma in Alabang. Another place that is lovely and romantic is Palato Fino on Jupiter Street, which has great Mediterranean cuisine. For interesting fusion—try In Yo in Katipunan, and for good homestyle Italian pizza served hot and fresh, the place to go is Cafe Caruso.

So after writing the book, what do you think is the secret to running the best restaurants in town?

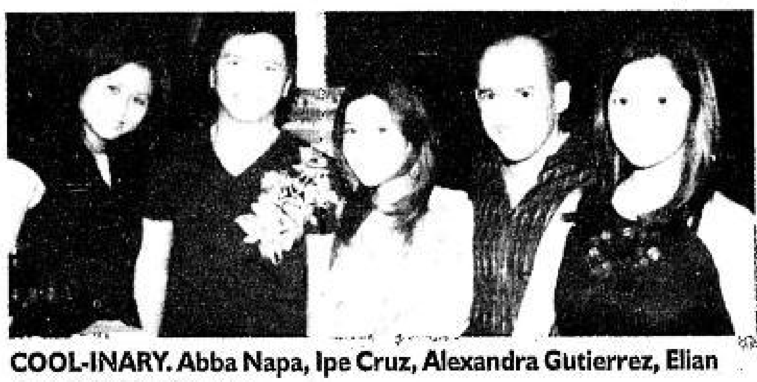
There is no one thing, but based on the people we have interviewed, it seems to boil down to passion, dedication to customer service, and creating the most authentic dining experience. Also most of the restaurants we went to that have foreign owners shared their own special recipes on the menu—we feel that definitely counts. Going to a lot of these places was like being welcomed into someone's home.

Any plans of putting up your own restaurant in the future?

That is something we think about way, way down the line. I personally would love to have my own place at some point in my life, somewhere I could hang out at the end of the day, drink a glass of wine, and see what gastronomic pleasure I can bring to people.

"Manila's Best Kept Restaurant Secrets" is available at all major bookstores.

SIGNATURE DISH. Author Ines Cabarrus signs her baby.



COOL-INARY. Abba Napa, Ipe Cruz, Alexandra Gutierrez, Elian Habayeb, May Muñoz

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International paper artist Tes Pasola goes green and crafts ingenious Christmas décor for a good cause

By Wanggo Gallaga

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Why should the holidays be exempt from this environmental trend? Decorating the lobby of the Grand Hyatt Hotel and Casino, renowned artist and production designer Tes Pasola exhibits her latest art collages turning the hotel's reception area into a gallery. Intricate scepters that resemble wood carvings hang side-by-side with wire lanterns creating a dazzling display that evokes classic Christmas cheer. Made entirely out of old newspapers and recycled wire, the exhibition expresses the importance of recycling and not being wasteful, even in Christmas time.

PASOLA'S parolas

JUST hanging around

Christmas Impressions at Hyatt is not just an art exhibit but also a fund raiser as each piece is for sale and all the proceeds go to Kythe and Make-a-Wish foundation. "Christmas is a time for sharing," says Tes regarding the project. "This display is in a public place, where a wide variety of people can view it [not only aficionados who frequent galleries], which makes it more interesting and inspirational. The intention and purpose of this project is therefore shared, and made accessible to a broader audience, making it even more meaningful and fulfilling."

WHEN old news is good news

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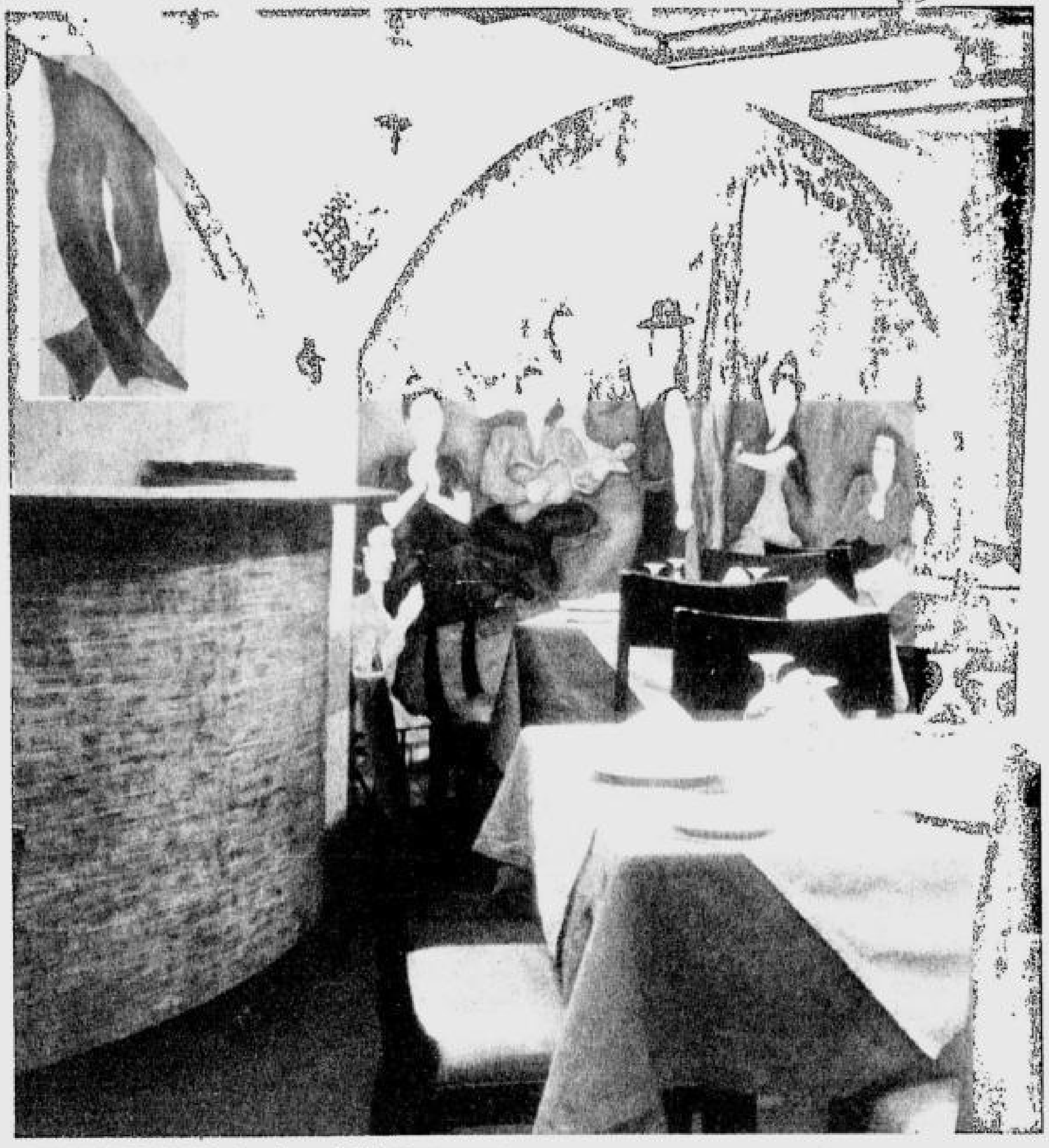
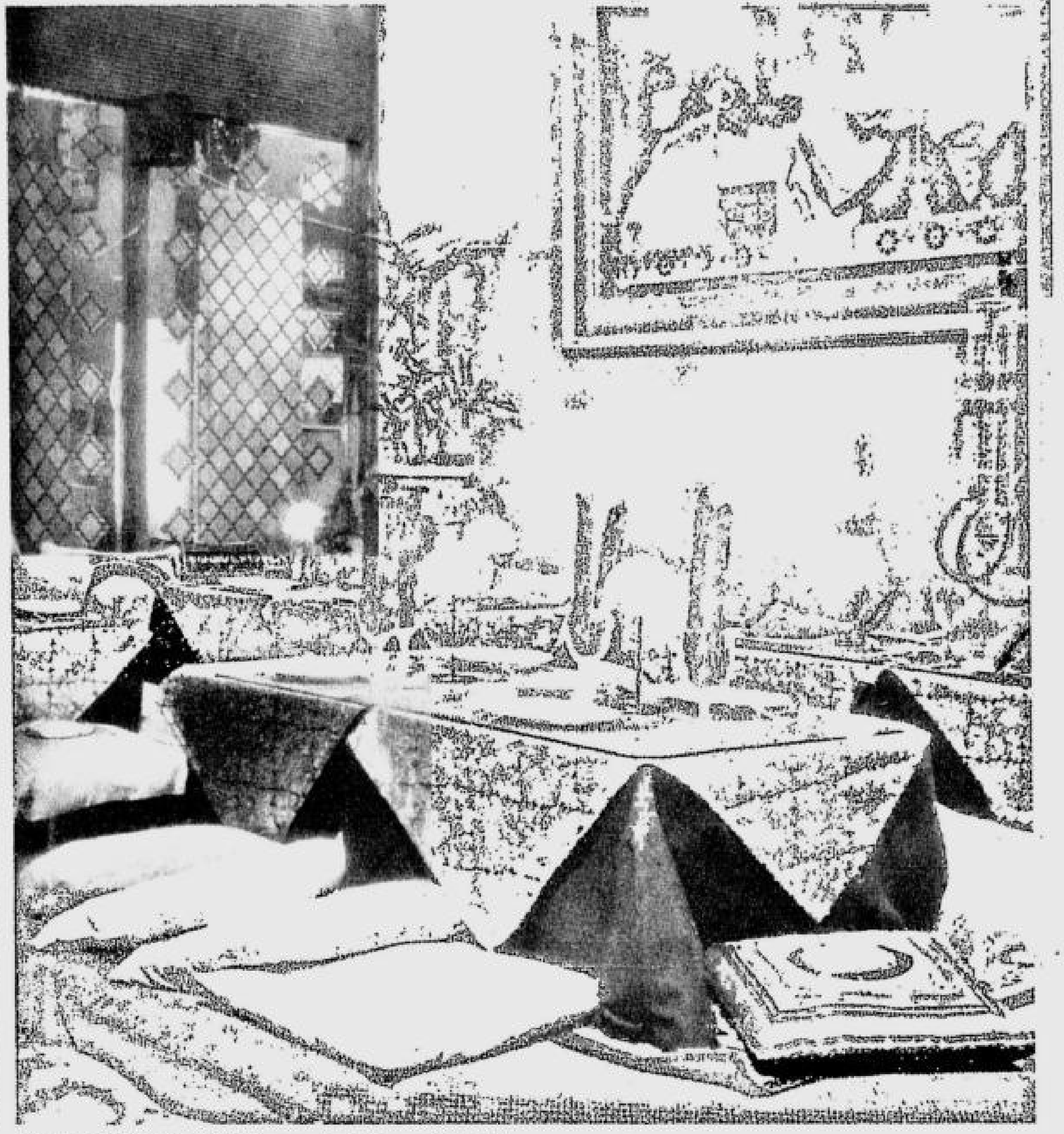
The exhibit runs until the first week of January. Interested parties may visit the Hyatt Hotel and Casino Manila to witness the intricately designed art work and can purchase their own to make a contribution to Kythe and Make-a-Wish foundation. For inquiries, please call 245 1234.


SPANISH RULE. The interiors of Alba Restaurante


ANCIENT WONDER. Ziggurat off Burgos Street

The Best Kept Secret is Out

From page D1

countant with two MBAs, known more among the city's night owls as an events organizer and DJ who has manned the decks in Manila, New York and San Francisco. The couple first conceived the idea while dining in a tiny, restaurant on the outskirts of Manila. "We were in a small unknown restaurant called Amoroma in Alabang," shares Ines. "Authentic Italian cuisine, great service—but believe it or not, there were only six tables! The place is always packed, and so we asked ourselves why no one knew about this place, and how can we share our experience with others and let them know that such a place exists. Someone should write a book..." A couple more glasses of wine later, and the idea was born.

DINNER FOR TWO. Clu Alvarez and Yesu Cabarrus

FOODFELLAS. Mark Jentes and author Elian Habayeb

"Manila's Best Kept Restaurant Secrets" is a visual smorgasbord of luscious photography by Edward Simon and delicious tales behind the best restos in town. I'd say the "best" part of all this is that it doesn't just feature the usual suspects if you were to do a "Best Of" list—La Tienda, Café Ysabel, Chef Laudico's Bistro Filipino, L'opera, Di'Mark's and (my current Filipino favorite) Abé, the book also serves up stories of off-the-beaten track treasures that are known only to the more adventurous foodies. Savor the pages about Manos Greek Taverna in Tagaytay, Ziggurat, Sonya's Secret Garden and (my favorite hole-in-the-wall Thai restaurant everrr) Som's.

BUFFET OF BOOKS. At the launch held at Topshelf, Fully Booked High Street

In between courses, I caught up with Miss Cabarrus who gave the dish on Manila's best. *Bon appetit!*

Have you always been a foodie?

I think I was a foodie from day one. I have always enjoyed great food and good dining experiences. Also, my career path speaks for itself in the sense that as a sommelier, one must always be in tune with the latest food trends as the true pleasure of wine is really brought out when paired with the right food. I pride myself in being able to often choose the right wine for the right cuisine.

There's a reality show, "Foodie Call," which is based on the premise that the best way to someone's heart is through the stomach. Does your love for food spice up your relationship?

I would say definitely yes. There is nothing like being with Elian in a great restaurant sipping on a fine glass of wine and munching on fabulous food. It's romantic, adventurous and decadent all at the same time!

Do you both cook?

Both Elian and I love to cook. We spend weekends on our own experimenting with different types of dishes, each one always trying to "up" the other with their creations. Lately we have been doing a lot of seafood—it's Elian's baked parmesan crusted sole up against my chorizo seafood soup at the moment! Both are absolutely delicious! And healthy.

What are your personal favorite restaurants in the book?

Of course Amoroma in Alabang. Another place that is lovely and romantic is Palato Fino on Jupiter Street, which has great Mediterranean cuisine. For interesting fusion—try In Yo in Katipunan, and for good homestyle Italian pizza served hot and fresh, the place to go is Cafe Caruso.

So after writing the book, what do you think is the secret to running the best restaurants in town?

There is no one thing, but based on the people we have interviewed, it seems to boil down to passion, dedication to customer service, and creating the most authentic dining experience. Also most of the restaurants we went to that have foreign owners shared their own special recipes on the menu—we feel that definitely counts. Going to a lot of these places was like being welcomed into someone's home.

Any plans of putting up your own restaurant in the future?

That is something we think about way, way down the line. I personally would love to have my own place at some point in my life, somewhere I could hang out at the end of the day, drink a glass of wine, and see what gastronomic pleasure I can bring to people.

"Manila's Best Kept Restaurant Secrets" is available at all major bookstores.

SIGNATURE DISH. Author Ines Cabarrus signs her baby.

COOL-INARY. Abba Napa, Ipe Cruz, Alexandra Gutierrez, Elian Habayeb, May Muñoz

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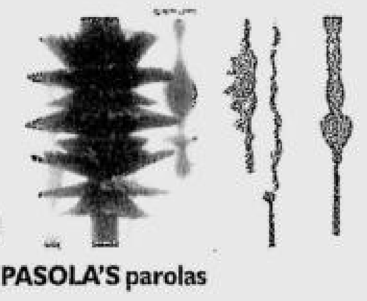
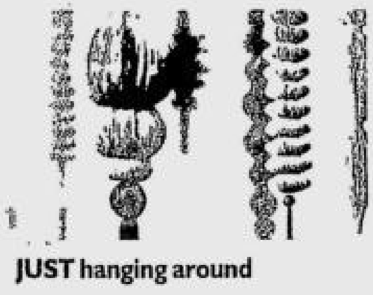

PASOLA'S parolas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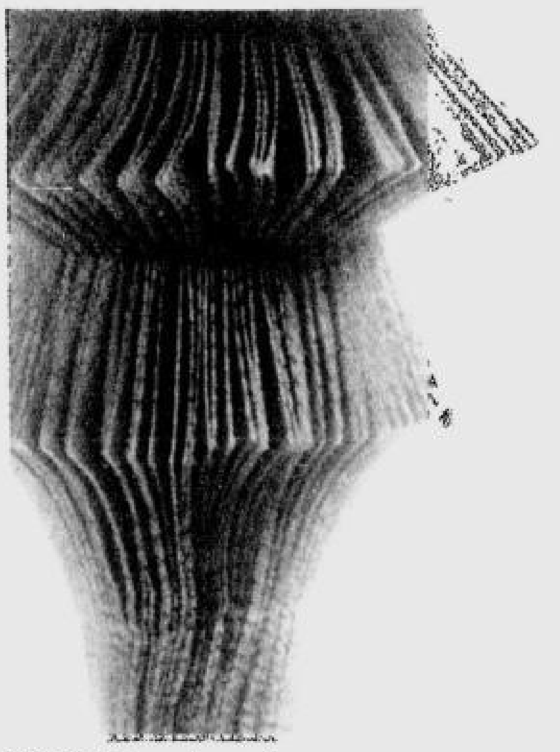
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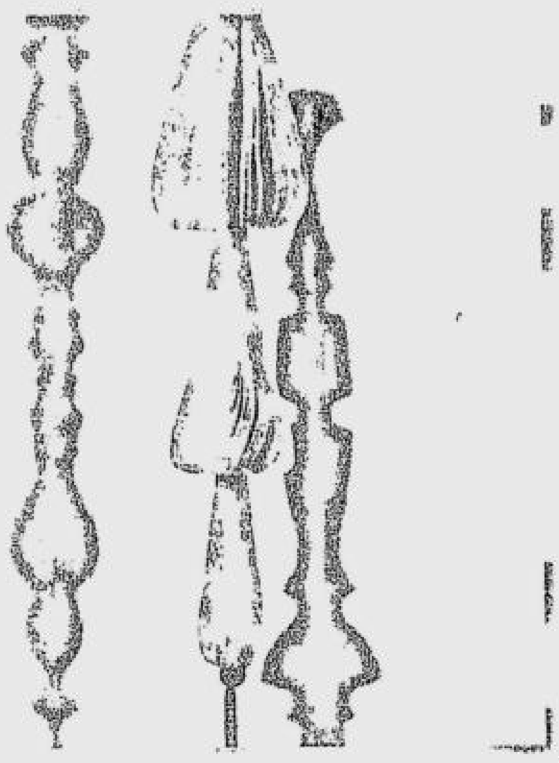

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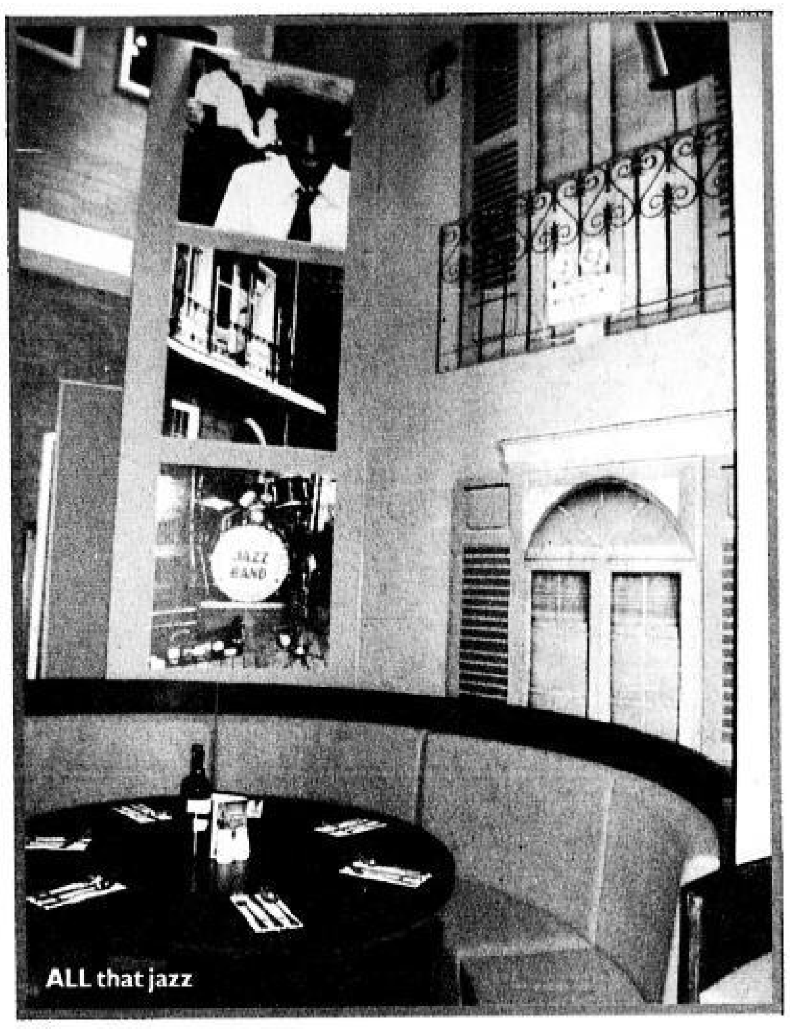
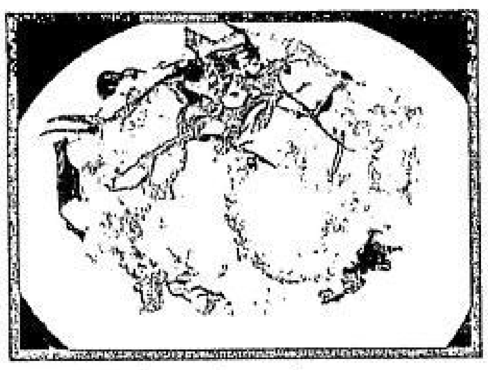

ALL that jazz

Comfort cajun and creole cuisine from Bourbon Street finds a new home on the High Street


CRABBY cakes make you happy

BOURBON street boys

Space Invaders

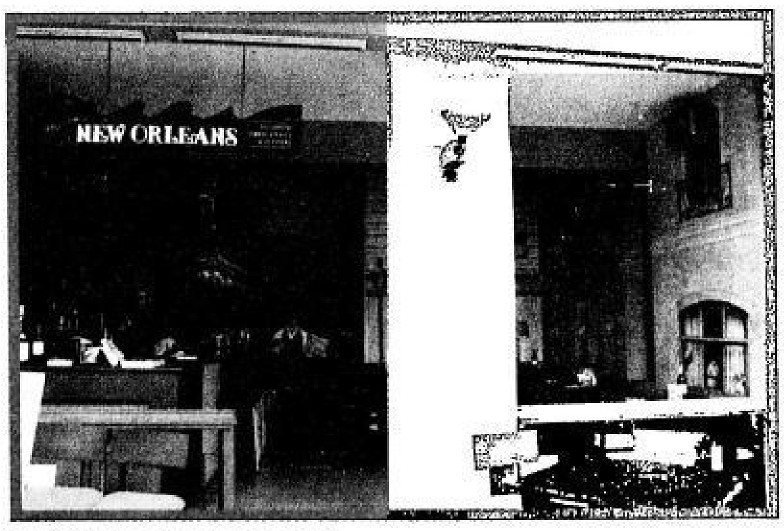
The rebirth of New Orleans

Text and photos
by Katrina A. Holigores

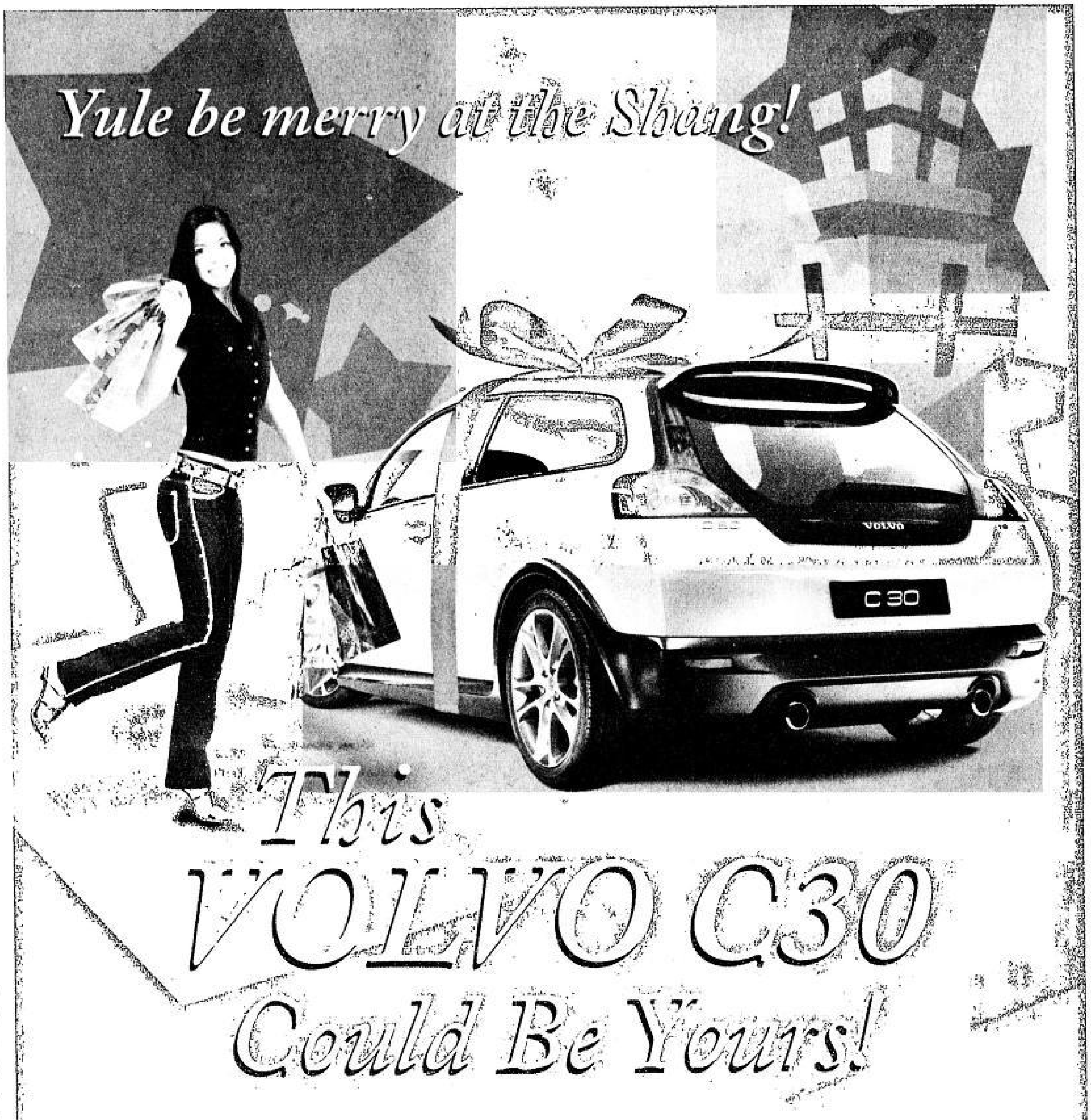
HEARTY MEALS ARE what you can expect at Murray's New Orleans Bourbon Street Steaks and Oysters. Both old timers and youngsters alike can also expect a rather colorful ambience once they stroll into the interiors of this restaurant that used to be a favorite hangout in the Greenbelt area way back when. First things first, as you approach it on the High Street in Fort Bonifacio you will have two options of where you'd like to sit yourself down and tuck into aforementioned hearty meal—there is the outdoor bar which is (alleluia) climate controlled so even if you're outside in the open air, you're not going to be sweating buckets even during summer months. The walls are covered from floor to ceiling with splashes of color, looking like buildings and people portraits of Bourbon Street dwellers. Murray Hertz, one of the proprietors explained to me that they are actual photos of typical scenes from New Orleans, blown up and "prettied up" in order to make them the perfect backdrop for diners. Inside the restaurant, the blown up photos continue so you can be seated beside a jazz band or have your back against the façade of a house (under a lampost). Look up and you will see cymbals that act as ceiling decorations. There are round table booths so you and your friends can have easy conversations and sharing plates will not have the usual elbow in your face mishaps. Since New Orleans is also partnered up with its neighbor, ClawDaddy's, you can order their mouthwatering crustaceans, such as the black pepper crab to accompany what you're already feasting on.

For a nightcap or just for a little people watching sitting outside is an experience in itself. You can pick from a barrage of alcoholic (like the espresso martini) and the non-alcoholic (grape shake is my choice) as you feast on oysters or their best selling six layer nachos. Lighter snacks are crabcakes and if you want heavier fare, go for the ribs or the steak. Always leave room for the dessert though—the chocolate mudpie with home-made ice cream is a heavenly experience for even closet sweettooths. This joke may be in poor taste but if only for the food, this Hurricane "Katrina" would certainly be making her way back to New Orleans very very soon.

New Orleans is located at B6 High Street, Fort Bonifacio, tel. nos. 856-4326 and 856-4785



CLIMATE controlled exterior



This holiday season, lots of wonderful yuletide treats and surprises are in store for you at the Shang, the metro's most sophisticated shopper's paradise.

'Tis the season to be jolly as Shang holiday shoppers get rewarded with a chance to win exciting prizes via a grand raffle promotion.

A 2008 Volvo C30 2.4L Sports Coupé and 4 SAMSUNG 106.68 cm (42") Plasma TVs to be given away!

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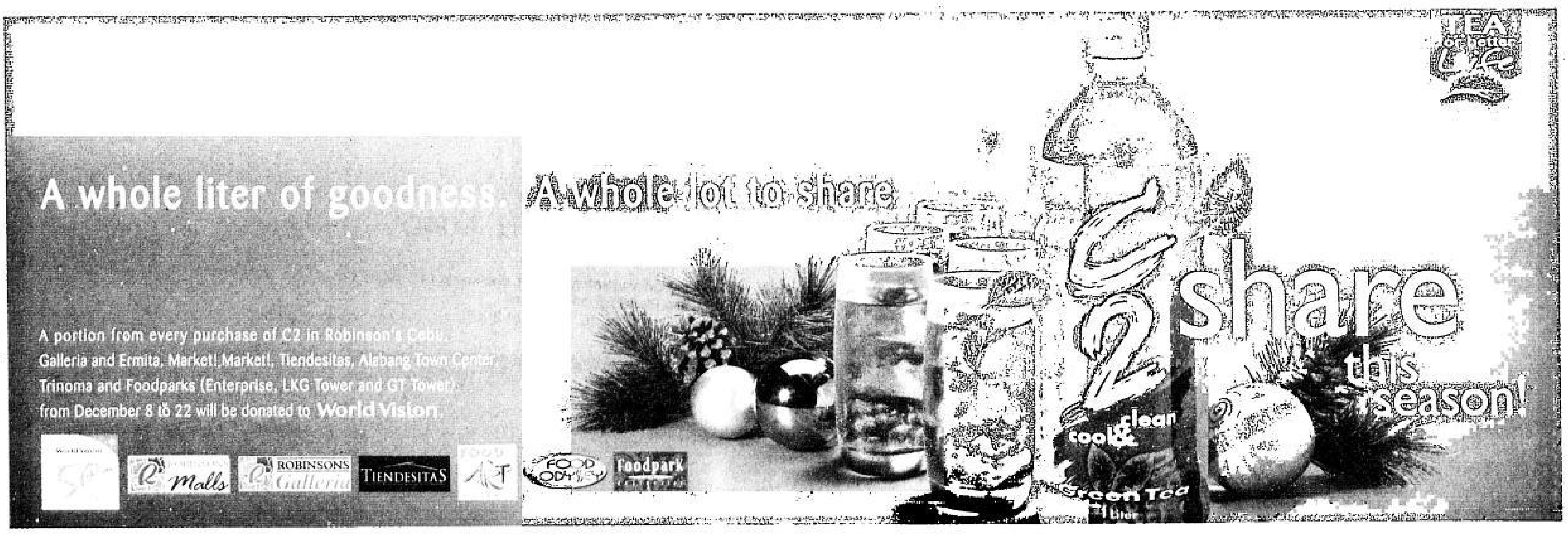
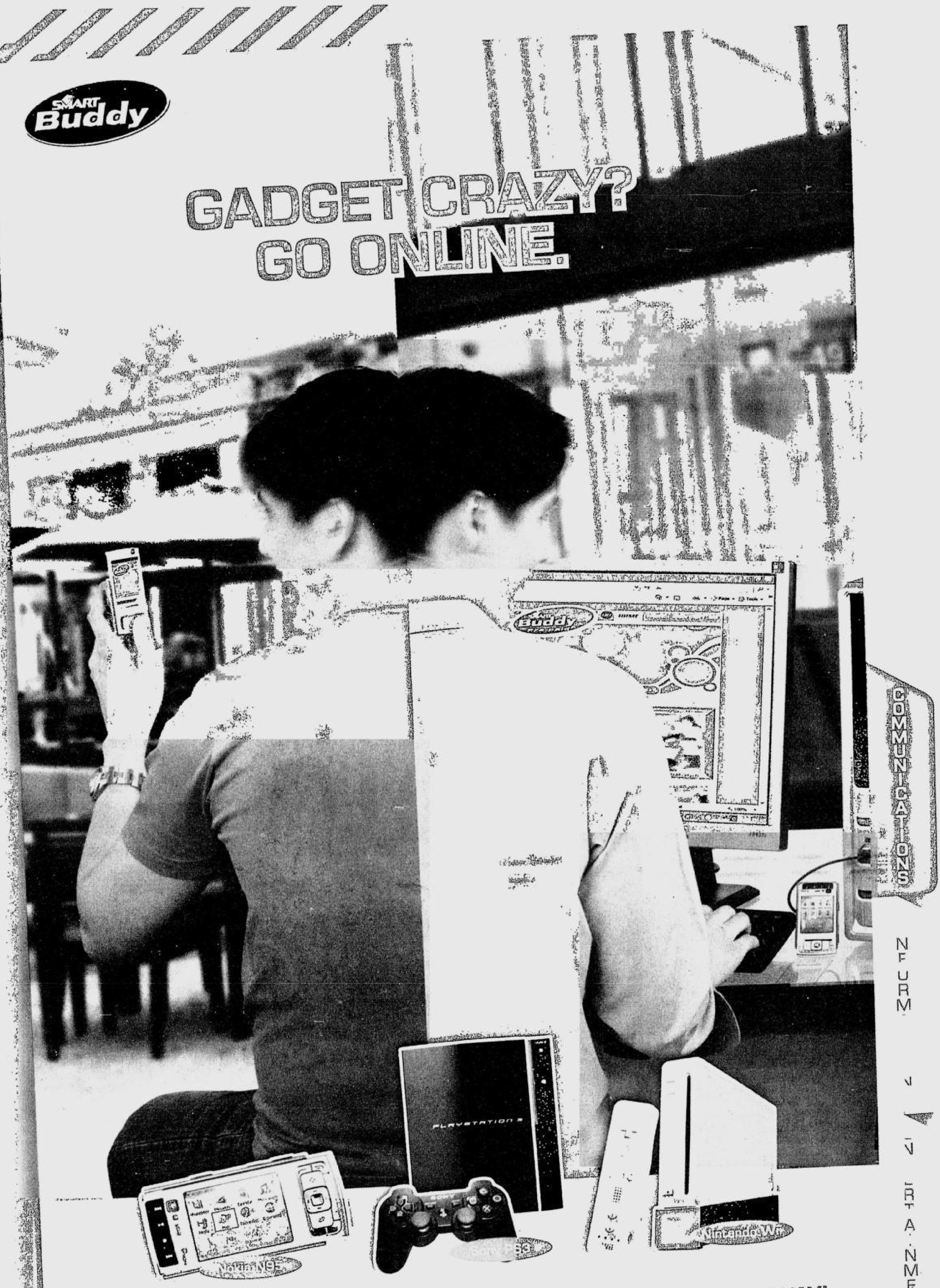
Promo Period: November 30, 2007 to February 3, 2008 • Preliminary Draws: December 19, 2007; January 9, 2008; January 16, 2008; and February 6, 2008 Grand Raffle: February 16, 2008 • For details, please call 633-7851 local 113/153. See posters and flyers for details. • Photo above may vary from actual unit. • Per DTI-NCR Permit No. A3-0967. Series of 2007.



A portion from every purchase of C2 in Robinson's Cebu, Galleria and Ermita, Market! Market!, Tiendesitas, Alabang Town Center, Trinoma and Foodparks (Enterprise, LKG Tower and GT Tower) from December 8 to 22 will be donated to World Vision.

SMART Buddy

GADGET CRAZY? GO ONLINE.



₱1 MILLION WORTH OF THE HOTTEST GADGETS TO BE GIVEN AWAY!

Ngayon, mas pinasaya pa ng leader ang **mobile internet browsing** mo!
₱10 for every 30 minutes lang, no per kilobyte charging pa!
May chance ka pang manalo ng Sony Playstation 3, Nokia N95 handset,
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Free registration – join now!

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Also open to all Gold and Talk N' Text 3G and GPRS users. See posters and flyers for details. Internet browsing rates are not applicable to SMART Corporate subscribers.
Promo not open to both Corporate accounts and SMART Bro Plan 799 subscribers.
Promo period: Dec. 1, 2007 to Feb. 29, 2008. Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 4575, Series of 2007.

SMART
THE POWER TO LEAD

Tomorrow in Lifestyle:
Young chefs-in-training
and their take on 'noche buena'

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2207 (Globe) or 283 (Smart)

Double Your Luck!
"MARITES ALLEN'S
FENG SHUI
WAYS TO WIN-Part 2"
WORLD OF FENG SHUI
TRIVIA: 14.Which animal sign is known for being creative genius, entertainer and have excellent memory?
ANS: a.Monkey b.Rabbit c.Ox d.Pig
To join, SMART and GLOBE/SUN subscribers simply have to submit a one-time registration by keying in THESS REG <name/address/age/gender> (Ex. THESS REG Dona Dy/Gold St., Marikina City/37/F) and send it to 2881. To answer,Send THESS <letter> to 2881
Yesterday's answer: c)Ox
For registration on January 10, 2008
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Watch out every FRIDAY at INQUIRER for the announcement of the weekly winners
Per DTI NCR series no. 4388 of 2007. Promo Period: Dec. 3, 2007 to Jan. 7, 2008

The 12 gays of Christmas

Why don't you give love on Christmas gay?

Merry Christmas Buddy

"I'm gonna have an open call for a modern Santa. He must look good with or without a red denim Santa suit, be able to drive a carriage of black Friesian horses with tack specially made by Hermes and yes, be able to give me a back rub and come down my chimney."—***Vic Barba, fashion designer, real-life Cinderella***

"By having a beauty pageant with my gay friends as our Christmas party" —***Carlo Cannu, makeup artist***

"One big juicy, thick hotdog in béchamel sauce garnished with two eggs for Christmas dinner and a solar powered vibrator from Santa."—***Joem Segovia, student***

THE 12 GAYS/ E2

By Tals Diaz
(Compiled by the Super crew)

THERE IS SOMETHING, how should I say it, very Broadway about all these Christmas carols.

Think about it for a bit. All that dancing and prancing, and donning your gay apparel. Someone please, where did all the Snowmen go?!!

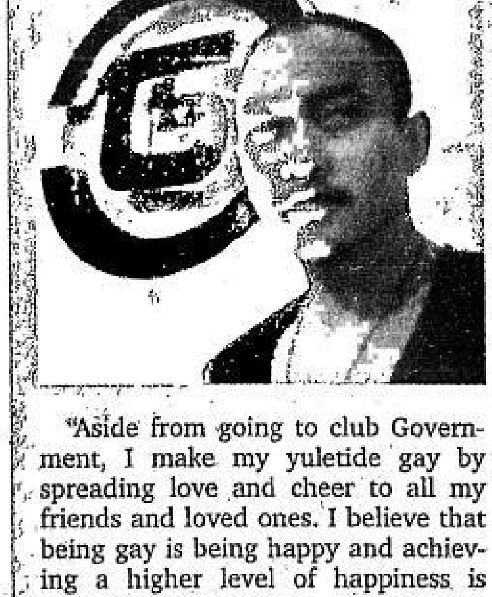
I'm wagering three French hens that the lyricists of these carols were most likely ho-ho-homosexuals, which is probably why Christmas is so glam. It does make sense after all, in a season whose most celebrated dessert is a fruitcake.

So in the spirit of the most fabulous time of the year, we asked around, how do you make your yuletide gay?

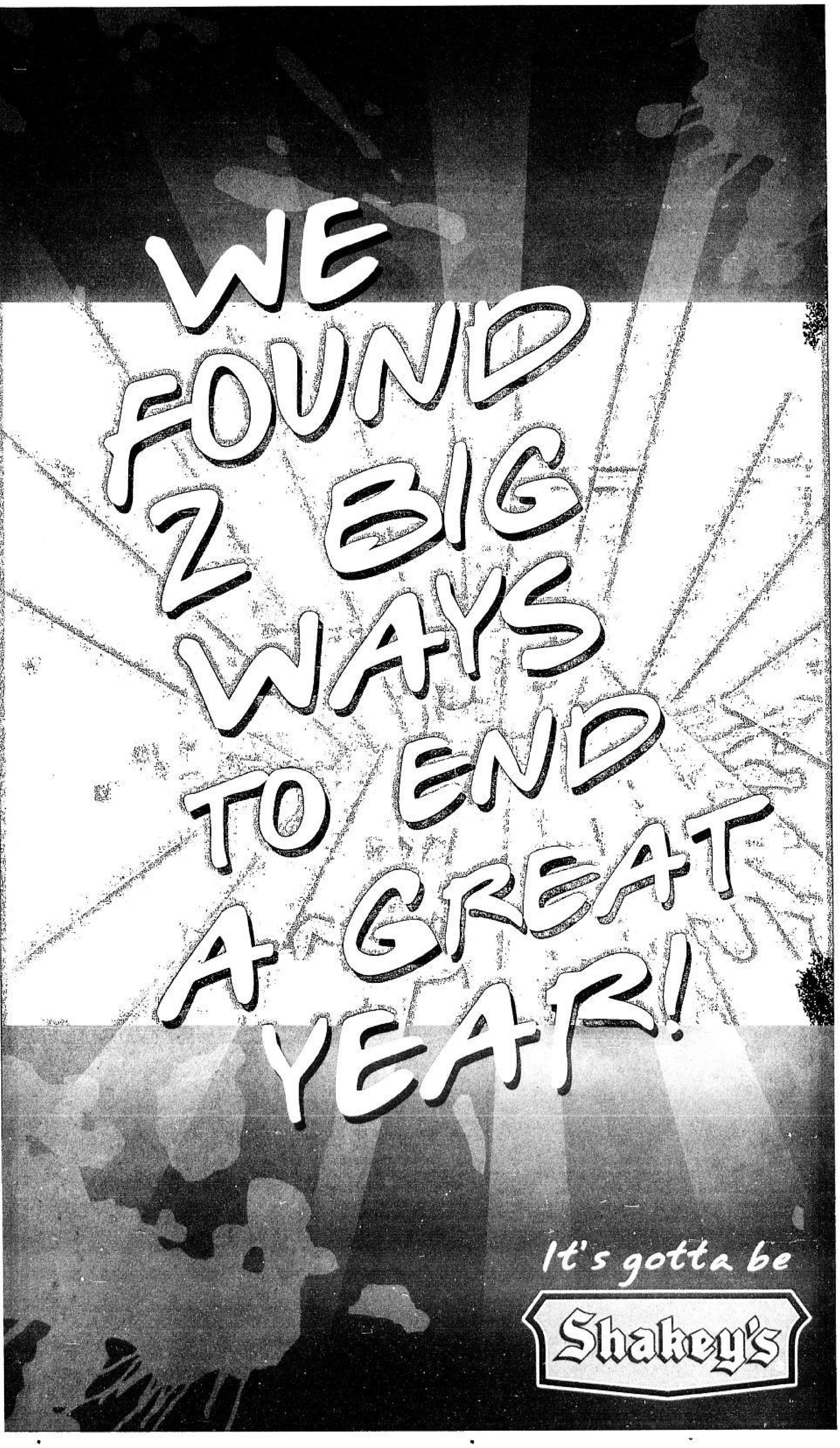
"Hmmm, well inspired by Lance Armstrong's famous question, 'What are you doing on Christmas day?' I'll be biking with my buddies on the hopefully traffic free roads. What makes this gay? My buddies are hot and we all wear skin-tight lycra bike uniforms."—***Jonjon Rufino, tri-athlete, all-around guru***

"Manood ka ng OK Ka, Fairy Ko sa filmfest."— ***Joujou Into, creative director, Publicis Manila; vixen***

"What's better than the spirit of giving? The spirit of receiving!! Time to update your wardrobe, *kikay* stuff and other useless things."—***C. Arnaldo, dancer and prancer***



"Aside from going to club Government, I make my yuletide gay by spreading love and cheer to all my friends and loved ones. I believe that being gay is being happy and achieving a higher level of happiness is coursed through the amount of happiness, compassion and excitement I bring to other people."—***Josh Dierón, co-owner of Government***



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Tomorrow in Lifestyle:
Young chefs-in-training
and their take on 'noche buena'

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[illegible] , FRIDAY at [illegible] of the weekly winners
Per DTI NCR series no. 4385 of 2007 Promo Period: Dec. 2, 2007 to Jan. 7, 2008

T 12 of Christmas

By Tals Diaz
(Compiled by the Super crew)

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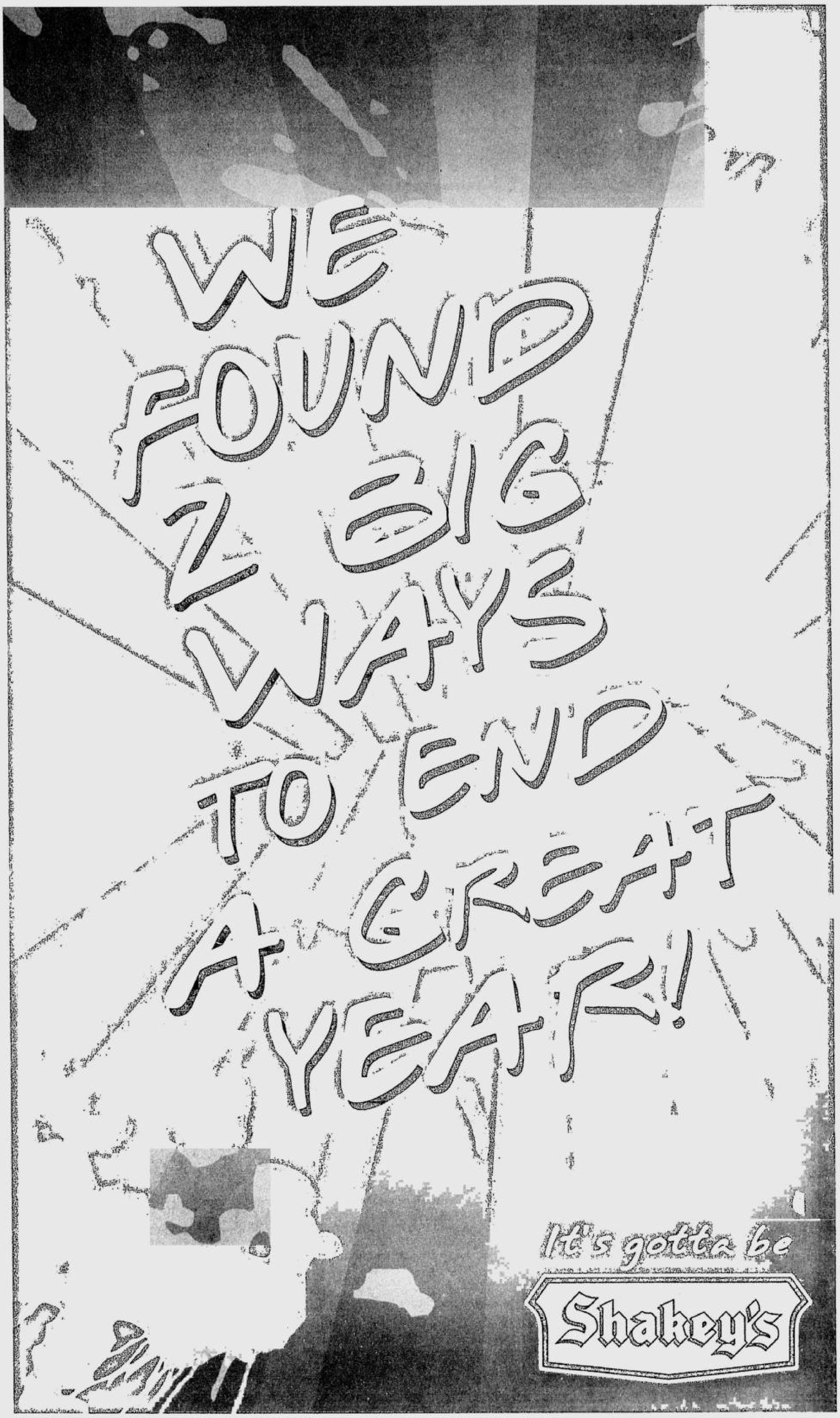
THE 12 GAYS/ E2

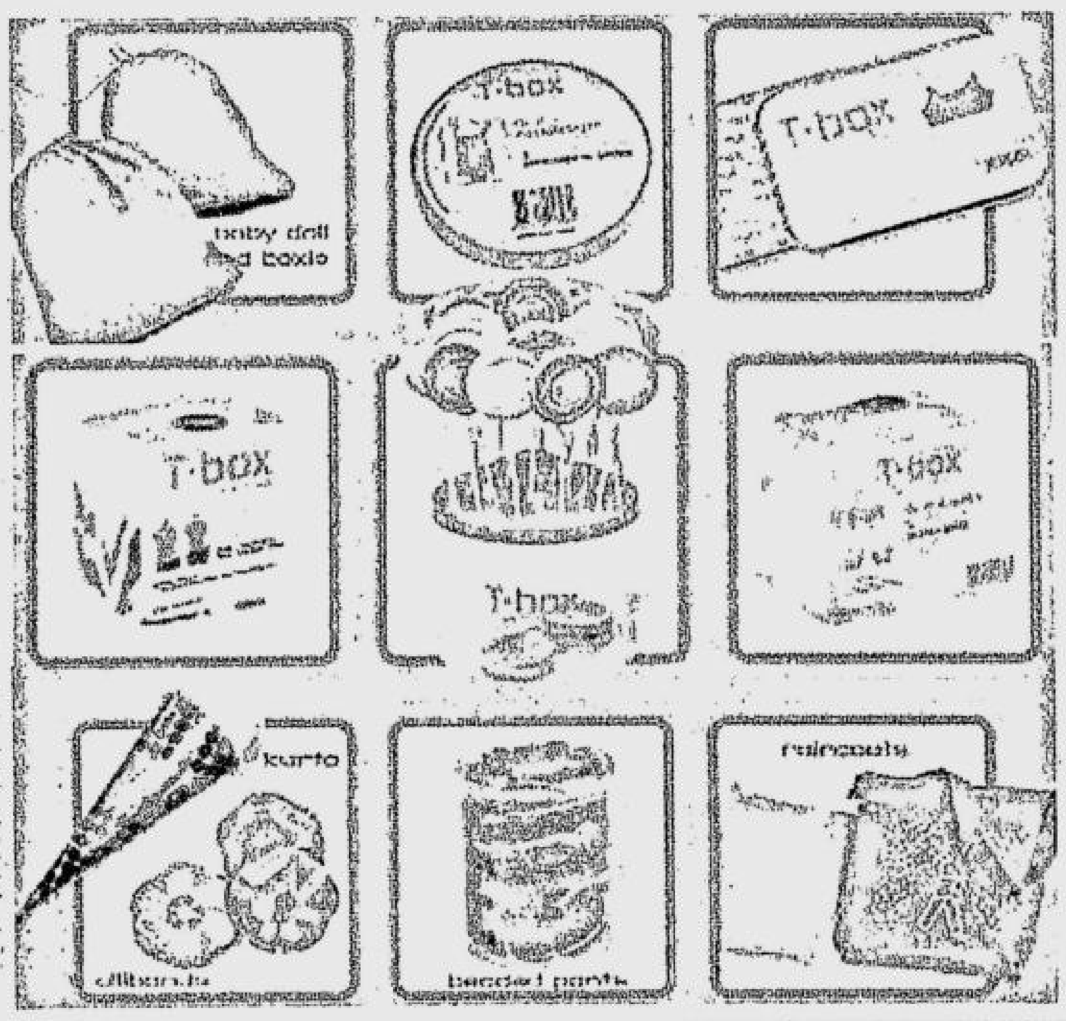


RETAKE OF PRECEDING FRAME

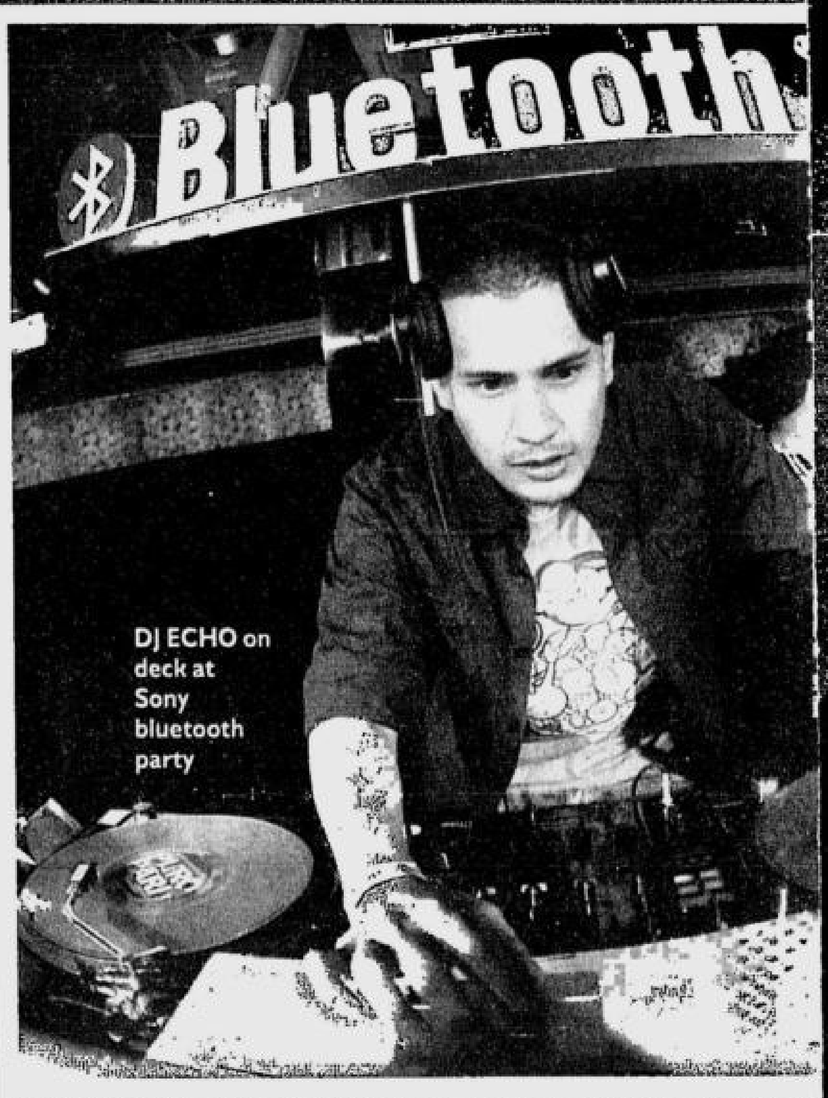
SUPER! SELECTIONS

Last-minute stocking stuffers

Big gifts, small packages



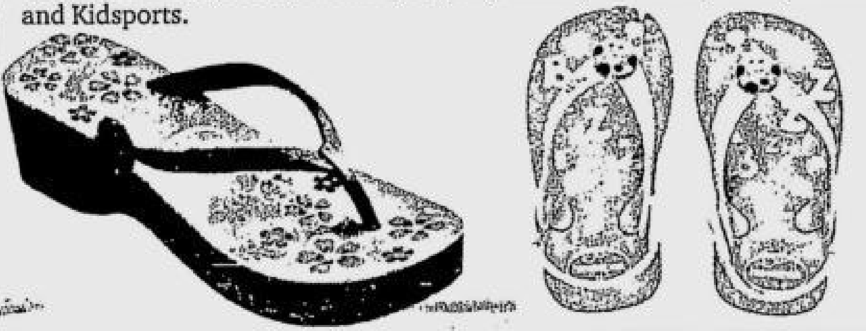
T-Box gets the Super thumbs-up for its nifty, candy-colored, shrink-wrapped packaging. Choice pieces from the store—from beaded pants and clingy tops to headbands and beach towels—are a breeze to wrap. And as if that's not enough attraction, T-Box is offering up to 40 percent off for every accumulated, single receipt purchase until Dec. 31. T-box stores are located at the 2nd lever of the Power Plant Mall, 2nd level TriNoma Mall and 5th level of the Shangri-La Plaza.

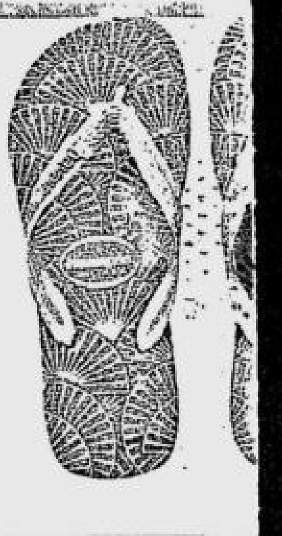


DJ ECHO on deck at Sony bluetooth party

Flip flop fever

The insane amount of pairs sold and the throngs of people that storm the stores when new stocks arrive leaves one with no doubt that Pinoys are hooked on Havaianas. Feed your friends' (and their babies') flip flop frenzy with pairs from the Brazilian brand's 2008 collection. Havaianas are available at All Flip-Flops, Celio, Chocolate Clothing CO., Gas, J&S, Moana, Nail Spa, ROX, Rustan's, Sepatu, Stoked, TheZone, Orange Juice and Kidsports.





No More Drama

YOU'VE GOT THE VOICE, THE TALENT, and the band. Now all you need are able hands for applause, willing ears to listen to your music, and the perfect venue to perform in. Lucky for you, the Internet is a great place for Indie bands to have all that because through it, you can share your songs to not just your family and friends but to people all over the globe. Imagine having the entire world as your stage and audience!

Thanks to Nokia's Independent Artists Club (IAC), these indie artists now have a shot at amplifying their music in cyberspace even more, sharing it to a wider audience.

Presented by Nokia, the mobile music leader, IAC is meant to be the hub for new music for fresh homegrown talents in Asia. IAC gives new acts the means to be discovered through its exclusive IAC chart.

This week, Super together with Nokia Music's Independent Artists Club, lent their discerning ears to one of IAC's fastest rising Indie bands, Juan Drama, Jr.

What's in a name

"Juan" and "Jr." is a tribute to the seminal Filipino rock band Juan dela Cruz, and "Drama" sums up our own experiences in trying to make it in the local the music scene."

Juan-O-I

"Juan Drama Jr. was formed in 2005 when Pinoy front man Gab Jover and Canadian guitarist Junior Devacais, decided to get together for some jamming after having heard each other play at a KATHA-sponsored Songwriter's Night in Conspiracy bar in Visayas Ave."

"The band is made up of former frontman of Iloilo based band "Buding" Gab Jover on vocals, guitars, and keyboards and frontman for Canadian band "Junedog," Juni Devecais, on guitars, bass. per

and back-up vocals.

JUAN Drama Jr. emotes

Current status

"We just finished recordi

die album called Summer

Mine, which features twelve

"We are also working on

2008 release of our first an

videos for the tracks "Sum

Were Mine" and "No Wa

videos were shot in loca

hotspots in La Union and Z

Aside from that, we are also

on the production of our th

for another track from ou

called Wondering."

Joy of Indie-pendence

"The best thing is that th

pressure to sound like the

most-popular band."

Sound Control

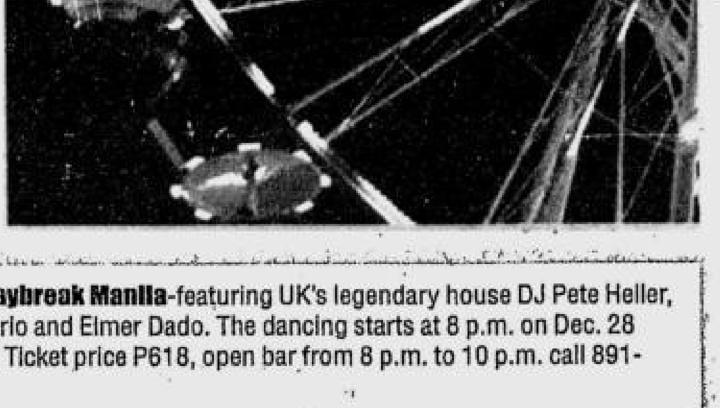
"Our music is pop rock,

24/7 SUPER RADAR

By Janine Cuenca-Dario and Stef Juan

SEE beyond the Christmas lights and decor, your Christmas shopping list, all the tinsel and wrappings this holiday season and you will find that there are places where people don't even know it's Christmas. **UNICEF** invites us to reach out to the children of Mindanao who need a day or two of peace more than new clothes or toys, or a greeting for the holidays. A small donation is all we need to start giving them the hope that peace is in "all hearts around the world." You can call UNICEF at 758-1000 to send in your donation or log on to http://www.unicef.org/philippines.

HEAR the screams and laughter above the roar of the rides in the **Global Fun Carnival** at the SM Mall of Asia Complex. These aren't your run-of-the-mill carnival rides, they are safe and they are fun and guaranteed to take your breath away. Make sure to go on crazy "Flipper" and hang upside-down in "The Ranger" and catch your breath afterwards and enjoy the view of the Manila Bay on their ferris wheel. Catch the rides before they're gone, as the carnival packs after Jan. 15. Call 911-5555.



TASTE and savor all the flavors of Christmas dishes at Spiral's Christmas Buffet at the **Sofitel Philippine Plaza.** Just when you think that you can't take any more, the Christmas delicacies interpreted in the eight international kitchens in this buffet will make you reconsider. Weight-conscious? The Spiral buffet includes not only 300 dishes to choose from, but also the best healthy and organic dishes from appetizer to dessert that are low in calorie, cholesterol and sugar but high on flavor. No need for guesswork as each dish is marked with a Cuisine Vitale label that provides its nutrition facts made by a dietician. Move over, Oprah! For inquiries and reservations, call 832-6988 or email at fbreservations@sofitelmanila.com.

FEEL and celebrate all that was great and crazy fun in 2007 at the longest-ever dance part in the **city-Daybreak Manila**-featuring UK's legendary house DJ Pete Heller, and of course, our very own greats: Silver Filter, Marie Garcia, Paolo Maralit, Papi Santos, Manolet Dario and Elmer Dado. The dancing starts at 8 p.m. on Dec. 28 until—you guessed it—daybreak. At the MC Home Depot Rooftop, Fort Bonifacio Global City, Taguig. Ticket price P618, open bar from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. call 891-9999.

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Born to be wireless

Music just sounds better with Sony Bluetooth, which showcased its aural fixation at a party in Embassy with DJ Echo. Sony's wireless portfolio includes the S610 Series Network Walkman, which is an ordinary portable video-mp3 player. With the help of Sony Bluetooth transmitters, non-Bluetooth audio products with an audio-out can now transmit wireless music to other Bluetooth ready products like indoor/outdoor headsets, and micro hi-fi systems, etc. Now this is the future of music.

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focusing
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"For first time listeners, we recommend the songs "Summer You Were Mine" and "No Way." Both songs have the surfing "sound" concept, which fit very well into the overall beach/summer vibe of our current album."

Like Juan Drama Jr., sign up at the Independent Artists Club (IAC)! To upload your songs, go to www.nokia-asia.com/iac/submissions.

If you're just out to check the freshest tunes, you can even get the chance to bag a five-day trip for two to Syndey, Australia for the Good Vibrations Festival on Feb.16, 2008. Just register from Dec. 6, 2007 to Jan. 17, 2008 and vote for your favorite track. Also up for grabs are two Nokia 5310 XpressMusic phones and two Nokia 5610 XpressMusic phones.

Get on board and visit the IAC website now at www.nokia.com.ph/iac.

EXPERIENCEmusic and culture surrounded in Philippine history this weekend, Dec. 21-23 in Paco Park's outdoor shows in Paco Park, Ermita at 6 p.m. and Concert at the Park in Rizal Park's Open-Air Auditorium on Sundays at 5 p.m. For more information and schedules http://www.nationalparks.ph or call 302-7374.

Schedules are subject to change without prior notice. For more information on events, log on to www.mag24-7.com or pick up your free copy of 24/7 Nocturnal Navigator at your favorite malls, bars and restaurants. You may also text 24/7 gigs to 2851 for Globe and Sun and 2951 for Smart. Submit your schedules before Tuesday to events@mag24-7.com & mag24_7@yahoo.com for inclusion in this column.

The 12 Gays of Christmas

To spice things up this year, I'm going to put my baking skills to the test and make cute sugar cookies! Be it a handbag, a fragrance bottle (Chanel No. 5 anyone?) or something that rhymes with a sock, nifty confections shaped, cut and decorated with colorful icing is a sure-fire way to celebrate your inner fag! Y'all know what they say—the only way to a man's heart is through their stomach. I agree! *—BryanBoy, professional online entertainer*

"Shop to death, eat to the point of gluttony, spend time with family and friends, give to charities and your Yuletide will definitely be gayer!"— *John Serrano, production manager, Fashion TV*

"I will make my yuletide gay by wishing for a naked Santa to deliver my gifts." *—R. Molina, analyst, mechanical spider creator*

"I'll pick my Santa and sit on his lap!"*—Tsok Cordero, Cebuano hottie*

"I make my Christmas gay by celebrating with someone who jingles my bells."— *Rem Zamora, marketing director for Repertory Philippines, bellboy*

E. RODRIGUEZ SR., QUEZON CITY (NEAR ST. LUKE'S)
ONE.
P. TUAZON (ACROSS SM CUBAO)
TWO.
GET TO ENJOY GREAT FUN, FAMILY & PIZZA IN OUR 2 NEW BIG STORES! EXPECT MORE TO COME NEXT YEAR!
It's gotta be
Shakey's
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METRO MANILA DELIVERY
If it's late, it's FREE

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- Elegant Double Ender Design

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SR-F78M(SS) 18cu.ft.
NO FROST
- 25% energy saving
- High Efficient Motor
- Nano-Ferrite System
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P44,000
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NO FROST
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May TAWAD pa!

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P6,935

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FREE 521MB SD 2pcs AA eneloop with charger

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- 10 MP Real-time Interpolation
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- Air Circulation Cycle Defrost

P33,409

SF-C13KP
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Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 5009 Series of 2007

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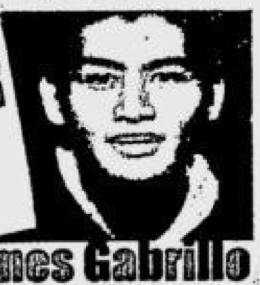
super

Good music(ians) will prevail

Alternative artists behind groove-worthy beats that you may have missed this season



THUNDER ROAD

James Gabrillo

Picture this

Rjd2 Deadringer

Jux does it

Jux does it

Keep [illegible] keeping it raw [illegible] RJD2 [illegible] album Deadringer.

Definitive Jux, the record label that released the album [illegible] mediocre [illegible] pop [illegible] refreshing [illegible] open [illegible] sounds of Aesop Rock, Mr. Lif [illegible] Murs, Cannibal Ox and label founder El-P.

[illegible] thing about hip-hop music [illegible] sound [illegible] personality and [illegible] Unfortunately [illegible] sonality.

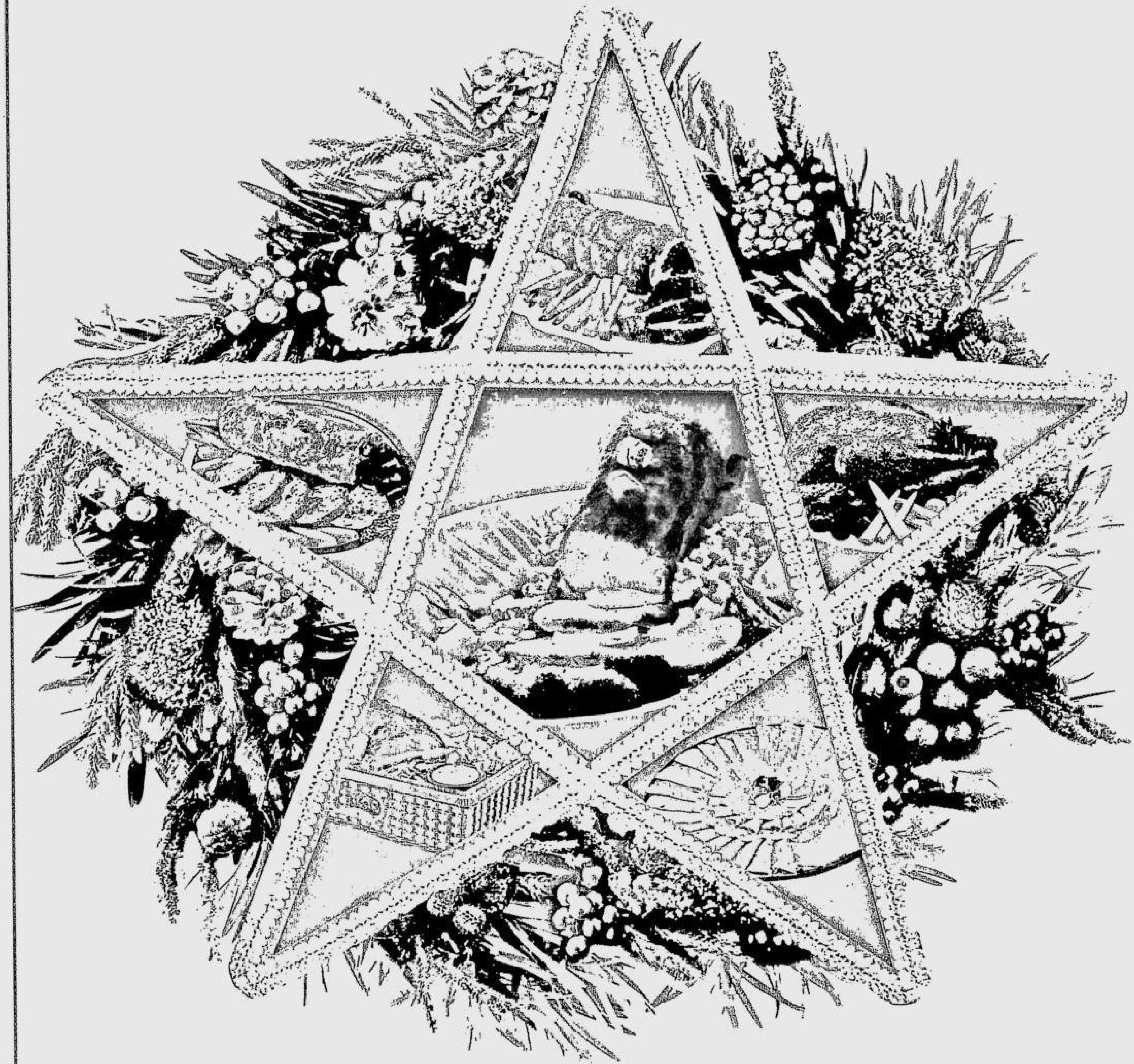
[illegible] more [illegible] packed [illegible] more [illegible] Wonder [illegible] nered four nominations [illegible] artists like Mos Def [illegible] prestigious Shortlist Music Prize [illegible] years back.

[illegible] refuse to die [illegible]

Picture this

[illegible] album [illegible] Richard [illegible] former band [illegible] nostalgia or getting [illegible] own [illegible] smoky [illegible] atmospheric [illegible] albums.

[illegible] new [illegible] accompanied [illegible] second [illegible] transform [illegible] group [illegible] contemporary music [illegible] Unlike [illegible] Opera [illegible]



At Christmas You Can Never Be Too Happy Or Too Hungry

Set your dinner table in grand fashion with our whole slew of the freshest, meatiest, healthiest, choicest foodstuff… it's Noche Buena with a sumptuous passion.

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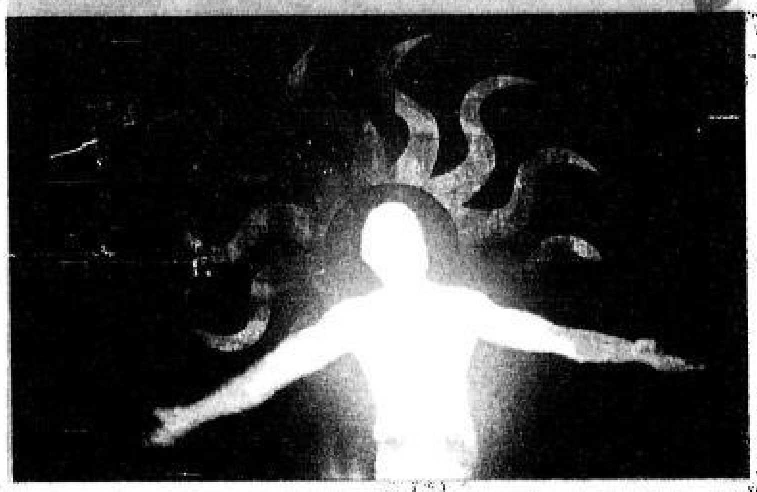
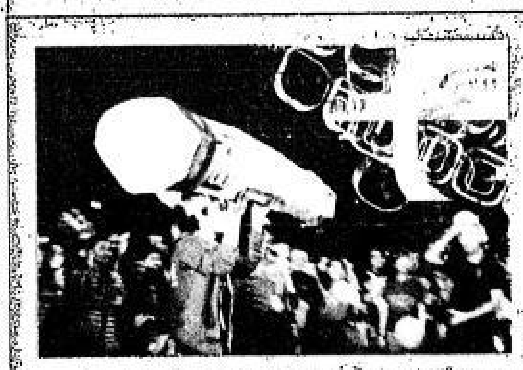
Farmer's Plaza | Marikina | Mercedes-Pasig
Sta. Rosa Laguna | Starmall | Zabarte-Caloocan

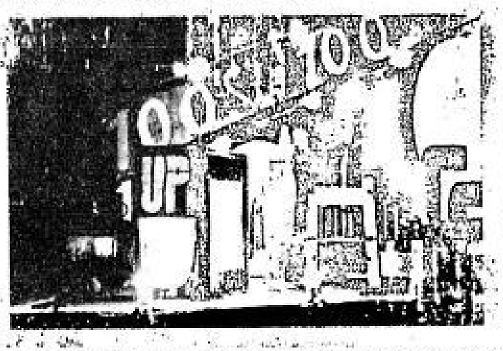


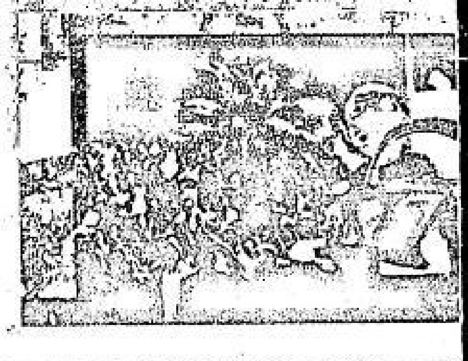
May your days be bright

The University of the Philippin
anniversary with a bang—this

Photos by James Gabrillo **Digital imaging by Dae Lee**







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4-pc Natural Remedy Gift Set
6" Assorted Jungle Animals
5" Sitting Moose or Dog with Scarf

Get a FREE Watsons 2008 Planner
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Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 0902, Series of 2007

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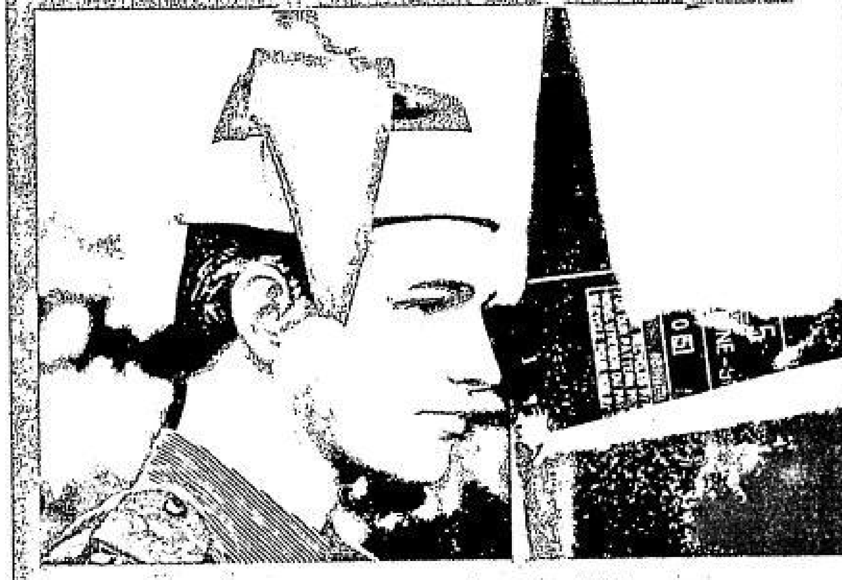

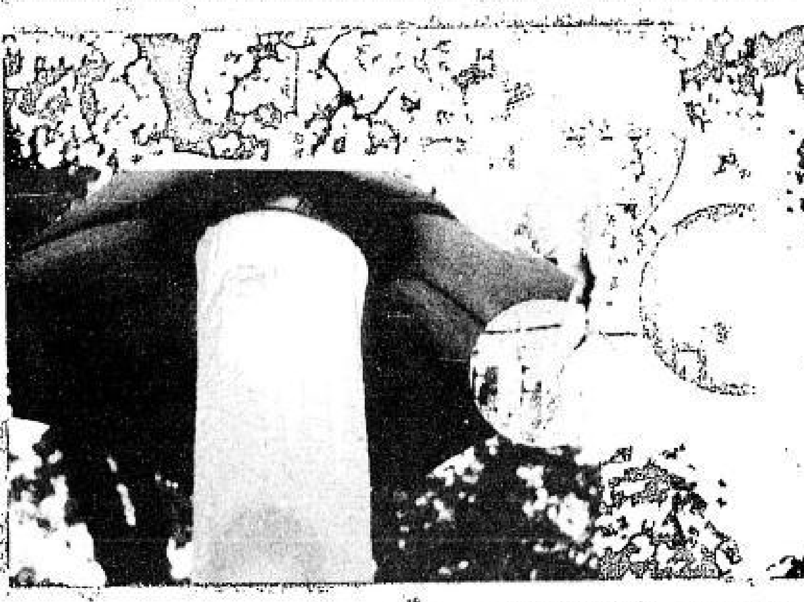

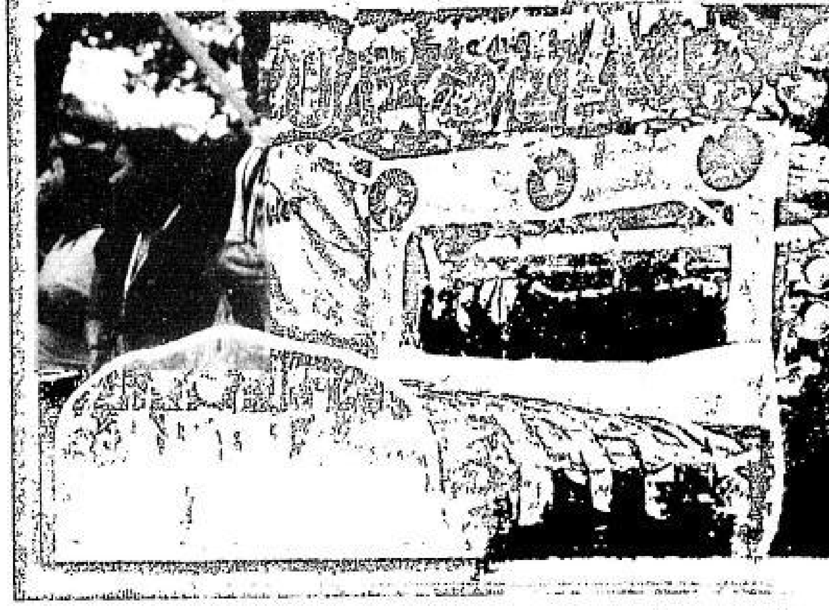

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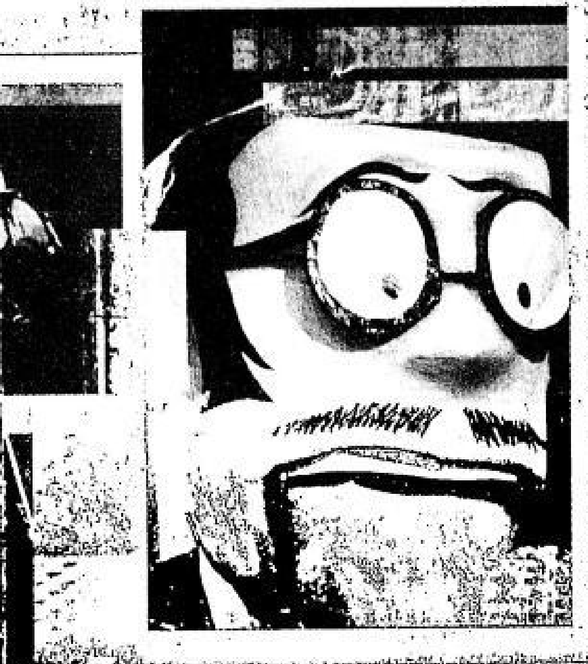
s celebrates its 100th year
s the Lantern Parade



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Natural Sleep Aid
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P12 per capsule

Sleepasil is not intended to cure chronic insomnia

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DOCUMENTARY-MUSICAL

HOSTED BY
MS. ANGEL AQUINO

DECEMBER 22, 2007 | SATURDAY
9:00 PM ON ABC 5

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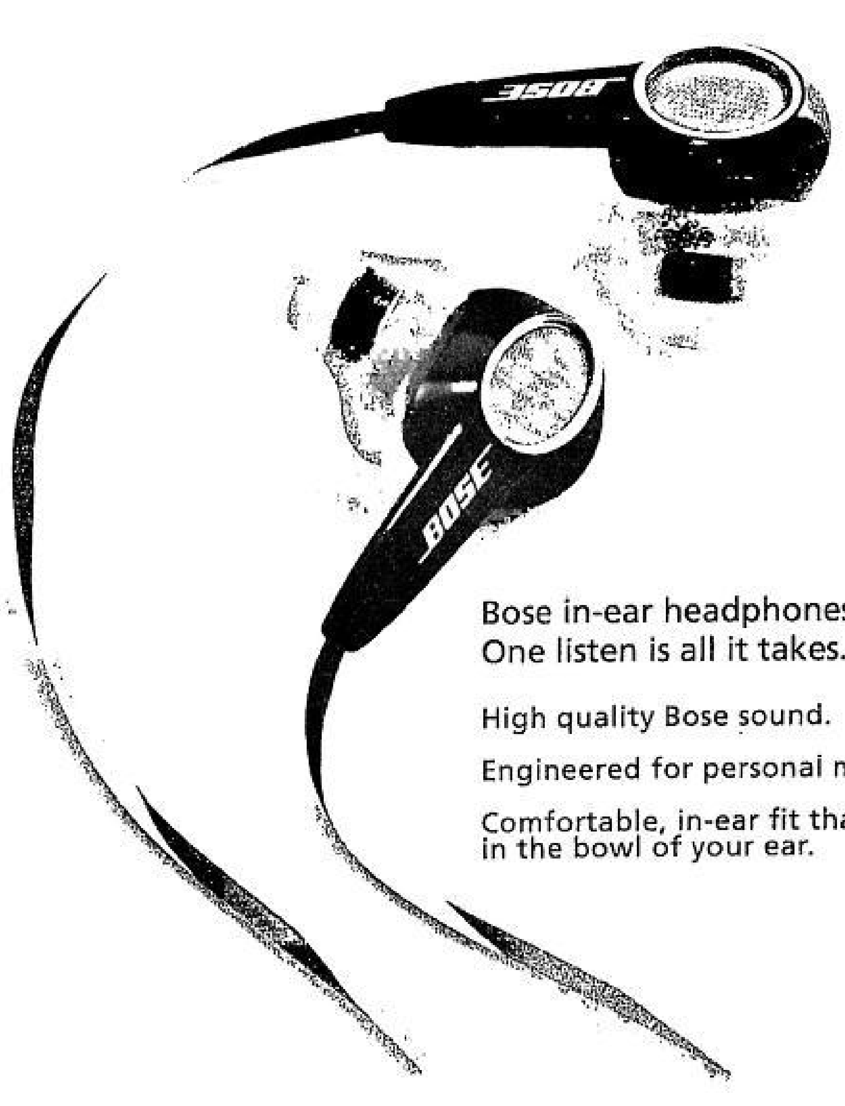

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High quality Bose sound.

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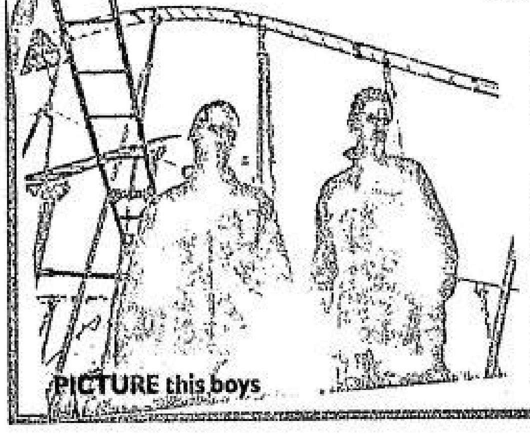
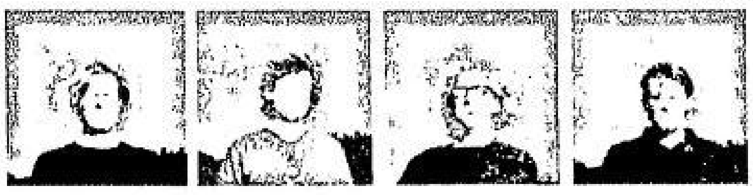

PICTURE this boys

Good music(ians) ...

From page F1

NEON love



Tosca's previous releases, "Dehli 9" feels like the open-air jazz-inflected rendition of memories that can't quite be pinned down.

Sounds come freeform rather than repeated in the trademark Tosca style. The result, according to Huber, is a kind of "sonic photo book. It's more like the living room and not the rock concert."

Like a lot of relaxing things, "Dehli 9" arose out of a series of seemingly discordant sounds that, in the end, turn out to be weirdly complementary and mood-inducing.

Can irony be this relaxing? As Dorfmeister points out, Tosca's second album, "Suzuki," was named for both the car company and the author of "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind." The final track on "Dehli 9," "La Vendeuse des Chaussures des Femmes Part 1," comes from Huber's childhood memory of being in love—with the daughter of a vegetable salesman. "Dave Dudley" reminded the two of truck driving.

Can the delicacies of relaxation be this subversive? As with most of Tosca's musical work, "Dehli 9" was formed without a rational production plan or a record company's timetable. Like an opera without a trajectory and like the Zen beginner's mind, much of the two-CD set seems to evaporate and materialize again and again.

"Dehli 9" took more than two years to record and mix, and the end result is unpredictable, diaristic, ironic, classical, ambient, enervating, and minimal—and also deeply relaxing—all at the same time.

Turin Brakes
ether song
BRAKES time album

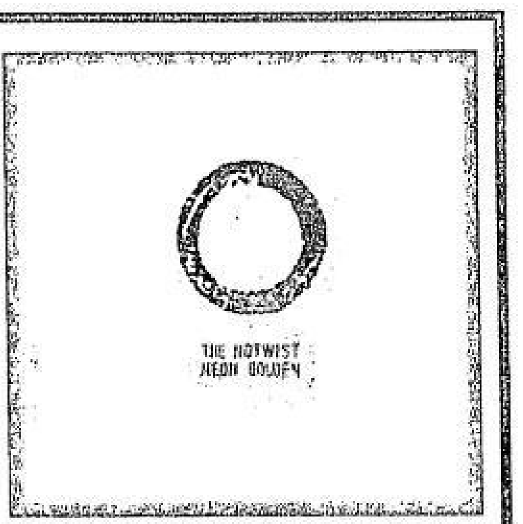
Brakes time

London duo Turin Brakes, known for its well-crafted acoustic tunes, kicks it up a notch on its new album, "Ether Song."

Produced by Tony Hoffer, who has worked with Air and Beck, "Ether Song" explores sonic landscapes beyond the six-string set-up.

The songwriting here is aces and any studio trickery Hoffer provides only enhances the product. Soft openings crescendo to choruses with traces of Jeff Buckley worn proudly on sleeve.

Neon love



With its sixth album to date, the obscure German outfit the Notwist puts itself on the map, connecting the dots between folk, electronica, and pop along the way.

Soft-spoken yet energetic, the outcome includes cello, banjo, muted horns, and more—sonically replete while accented deftly by programmed blips, chirps, and buzzes.

Neon Golden recalls dark '80s synthpop with a phosphorescent glow. Needless to say, the kids are gonna eat this up. As they should.

THE DETROIT EXPERIMENT
LAB report album

Lab report

Hypothesis: Get some of Detroit's finest jazz musicians (Bennie Maupin, Geri Allen) and DJ/producers (Carl Craig, Karriem Riggins), and record/mix/remix them playing together unrehearsed.

Results: Streams of bass, beats, and straight-ahead jazz creating a sublime confluence of chill moods and unique interplay.

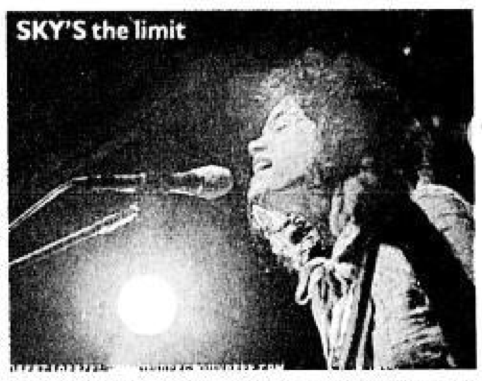
Conclusion: The Motor City has successfully pollinated jazz and electronic (with class intact).

Sky's the limit

Moving slowly like swells across a sea that roams rain-soaked coasts but never gets close enough to break, "Under a Different Sky" is white-capped by Via Tania's sweet, solemn breathiness.

Speaking more than singing, Tania weaves herself around simple beats, electro blips, and spare instrumentation.

Even with the help from John Herndon and Doug McCombs of Tortoise and Howe Gelb of Giant Sand, the sound is surprisingly sparse, creating fullness through absence rather than presence.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IN THIS ISSUE
'Wild girls' dominate show biz headlines in 2007 /H2

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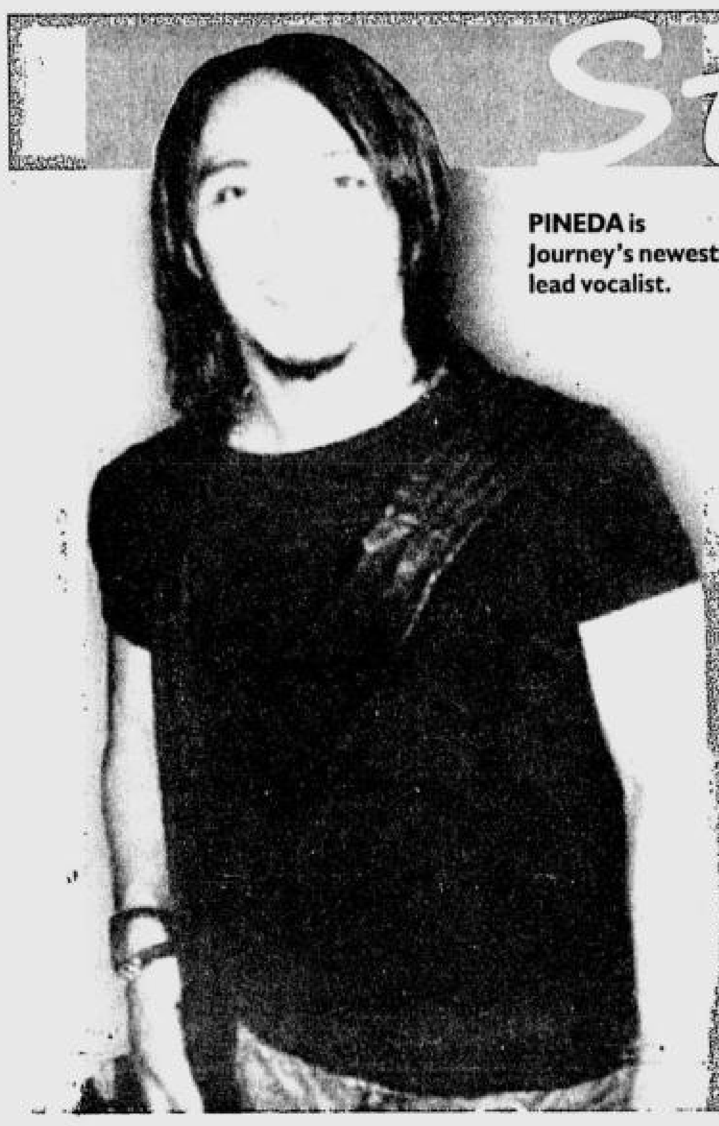
Stardom beckons to young musical comers



PINEDA is Journey's newest lead vocalist.

By Rito P. Asilo

THE LOCAL MUSIC scene has something to crow about this month: While Fil-Am looker Nicole Scherzinger, The Pussycat Dolls' former lead vocalist, is busy drumming up interest for her solo album, "Her Name is Nicole," we receive word from actress Christine Carlos that a homegrown Filipino singer has been tapped by the popular rock band, Journey, to replace its lead vocalist, Jeff Scott Soto, who left the group in June.

Power ballads

Originally headlined by Steve Perry, Journey—which popularized the power ballads, "Who's Crying Now?," "Only the Young," and the karaoke staple, "Open Arms"—found its new frontman, Arnel Pineda, early this month after seeing footage of the steel-voiced *Pinoy* rock singer performing Journey covers with local rock covers band, The Zoo, on YouTube.

Pineda completes the rock quintet that also includes Jonathan Cain, Neal Schon, Deen Castronovo and Ross Valory. So, uploading those grainy clips on the 3-year-old video-sharing website *does* have its advantages, after all!

Indeed, the local entertainment scene is a treasure-trove of musical riches. Other fresh faces are also gearing up for their share of the spotlight: A few years ago, we found ourselves listening to the recording debut of a new acoustic group called U-Turn. We weren't really bowled over by the familiar repertoire—after all, most of their songs were remakes.

POON. His compositions hint at his sensitivity and sense of introspection.

However, the group's lead vocalist managed to give those romantic ballads a fresh sound and a warm, lived-in musical sensibility. The rich, velvet-smooth voice belonged to Richard Poon—the goodlooking brother of versatile singer *cum* theater actress Eva Marie Poon—who sang Joey Albert's "Million Miles Away," Cliff Richard's "Suddenly" and Stevie Wonder's "It's You" like they were written for him.

Fast forward to the present: Richard comes into his own with the release of his career-making solo album, "I'll Take Care of You," the carefully chosen lineup of which includes Harry Connick Jr. staples ("More," "Let's Call The Whole Thing Off"), classic movie themes ("Moon River") and OPM hits ("Kahit Maputi Na Ang Buhok Ko").

Richly melodic

Richard has the kind of voice that shines in songs that require pitch-perfect singing, so his style suits Eric Benet's richly melodic tunes like "The Last Time."

Another noteworthy track is the sweetly rendered album opener, "I'll Take Care of You," which shows off Poon's ability to glide from one tricky note to another without effort.

But, he is less successful in his cover of the well-loved Henry Mancini classic, "Moon River," whose sleek, new arrangement strips the song of its melancholy and dreamy wistfulness. And Richard's relaxed singing style occasionally leads to some slurred notes.

POPULAR rock band discovered its new steel-voiced *Pinoy* rocker on YouTube.

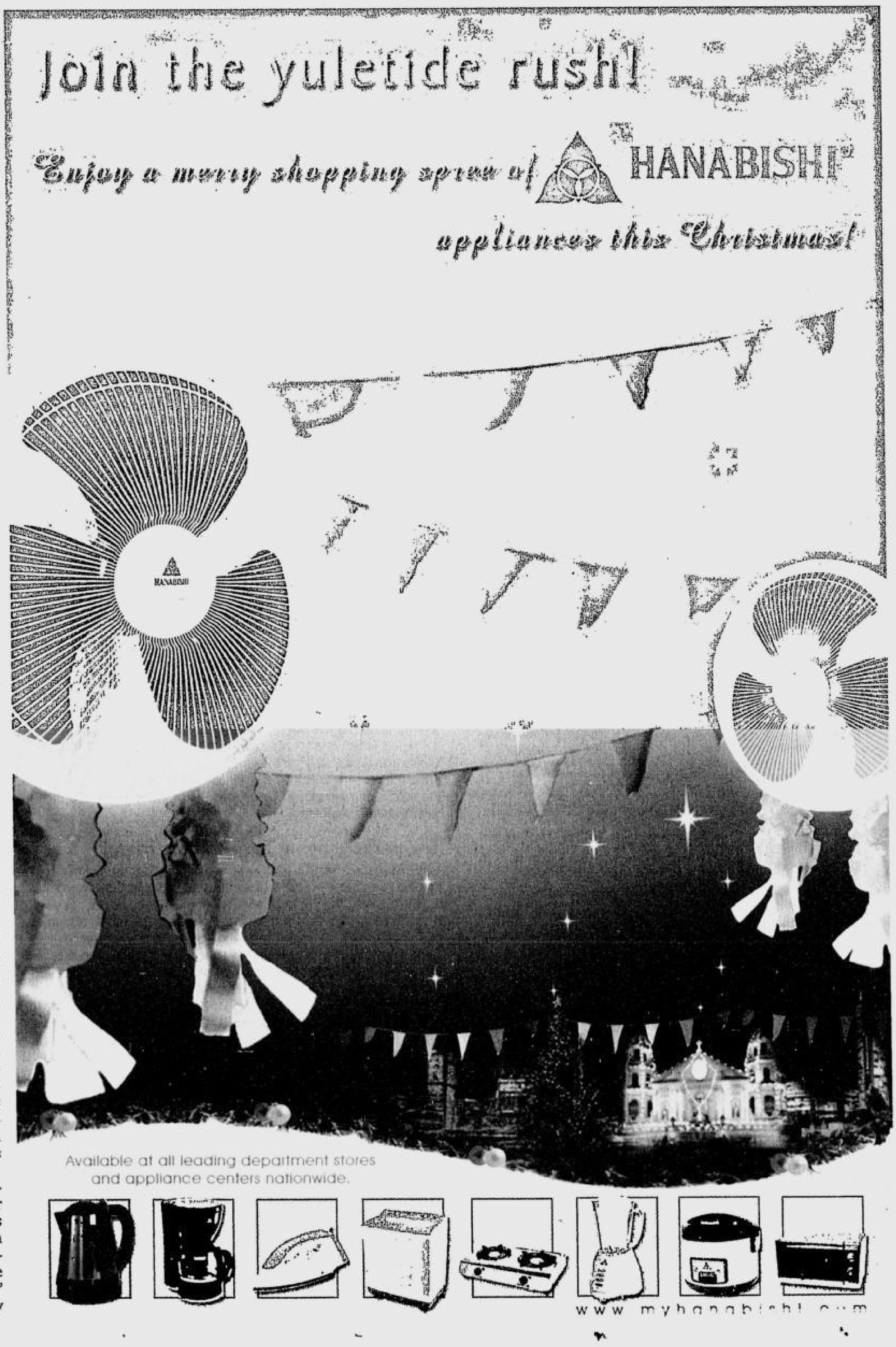
Unlike most crooners, however, Richard is not just another beautiful voice. He also writes songs that thrive in his smooth renditions: The Big Band-sounding "Naaalala" and the luxuriously somber "Goodbye" hint at the crooner's sensitivity and sense of introspection. (Another sample of Poon's notable compositions, "Lalala," is a tuneful treat that is featured in Piolo Pascual's "Paano Kita Iibigin?" album.)

But, Richard also knows how to ham it up, as is evident in his gleeful reworking of Rey Valera's "Kahit Maputi Na Ang Buhok Ko." With his distinctive voice and a cracklingly catchy, Latin-tinged arrangement, he sings "Way Back Into Love" (from the film, "Music and Lyrics") with the flair and confidence of a pro—and musically demonstrates how he makes his mark in his solo debut.

Davao-honed talent

Another singer who deserves a big break is Thor (*aka* Ettori Dulay) who, like South Border's Jay Durias and Freestyle's Jinky Vidal, is a Davao-honed talent. His album, "Soul Obsessions—Duets with Thor," shows us why:

Thor holds his own in his collaborations with MYMP ("Be My Number Two"), Nina ("Whenever You Call"), Luke Mejares ("The Girl is Mine"), Amber ("Spend My Life With You"), Sofia ("You Don't Know Me"), and Durias, who teams up with the promising singer in the album's best track, "What About Love?"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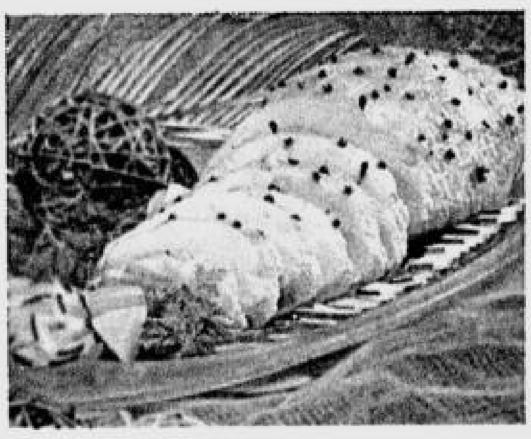
Shangri-La's Christmas options

SHANGRI-LA'S MACTAN RESORT AND Spa, Cebu presents a tempting array of Christmas dining options and entertainment to capture the spirit of the festive season, with each of the hotel's restaurants and lounges offering a tempting lineup on top of its regular fare.

In addition to their á la carte menus, Acqua and Tides restaurants are offering a selection of special Christmas dishes on Dec. 22. At 6 p.m. the Santo Niño Children's Choir performs Christmas classics and folk songs at the Lobby Lounge, and at 7:15 p.m. fire dancers will perform a unique tribal-infused dance while spinning fire-lit ribbons at the Tides Piazza.



Acqua's popular "Sparkling Sundays" lunch promotion returns on 23 December, offering guests a choice of more than 30 dishes in individual servings priced at only Php300 per dish, as well as Prosecco sparkling wine priced at only Php300 per bottle. The Santo Niño Children's Choir performs Christmas classics and folk songs at the Lobby Lounge at 6:00 p.m., and fire dancers perform at the Tides Piazza on the same day, at 7:15 p.m.

Acqua and Cowrie Cove are offering special set dinner menus on Christmas Eve, while the "Noche Buena" lunch and dinner buffet is available at Tides restaurant. The Noche Buena is a well-loved Filipino tradition of kith and kin coming together to partake of a spread of lavish food to toast the Christmas season. Christmas Eve entertainment will include a "Fantastic Acrobatics" show at the Buko Bar gardens at 4 p.m. and the Celestial Voices Choir performing at the Lobby Lounge at 6 p.m. All are welcome to attend the Christmas Eve Mass at the Ocean Pavilion at 6:30 p.m.

On Christmas Day, Acqua is offering a lunch spread of festive Italian favorites with the "Dolce Natale" lunch buffet. For more information, Log on to www.shangri-la.com.

Grand holiday dining at The Richmonde Grill

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Come New Year's Eve, scrumptious international favorites that include Steamed Ginger Snapper, Roast Lamb Leg, Pork Hamonado, Pastel de Lengua, Shrimp Tempura, Shabu-Shabu and Chicken Shawarma fill the Grill's buffet spread. Rich and absolutely delectable, various starters, entrées and sweet endings satisfy every craving for a hearty dinner celebration. For inquiries and reservations, call 689-8412 or 638-7777 extension 3409.

Palaisdaan Restaurant hosts your family reunion

A TRULY festive Paskuhang Pinoy or Filipino family reunion unfolds this Christmas at Palaisdaan Restaurant, Quezon province's top country dining destination located at the foot of Mt. Banahaw in the city of Tayabas. Like in the past years, the restaurant's pavilions and halls will again be the favorite venue for the traditional family get-togethers specially among balikbayans and returning OFWs yearning to experience authentic holiday revelries in the countryside. For this Yuletide Season, Rene de Los Santos, manager of Palaisdaan Restaurant, hired a team of handicraft weavers to dress up the place with colorful native ornaments fashioned from indigenous materials to create the country look. For inquiries, call (042) 793-3529 or visit www.palaisdaan.com.ph.

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THE RENAISSANCE MAKATI, MANILA LIGHTS UP CHRISTMAS
The Renaissance Makati City Hotel, Manila (formerly the New World Renaissance Hotel) kicked off the holiday celebrations last Dec. 1 when the hotel's executive committee members namely (from left) director of operations Sujeet Kumar, director of finance John Kwok and director of human resources Geuel Auste had an official tree-lighting ceremony. The hotel's Christmas tree, made up entirely of colorful capiz 'parols' or Christmas lanterns, lit up the lobby and made one feel unmistakably that Christmas is indeed upon us all. As the tree was lighted, the Sto. Niño Choir filled the air with their melodious carols, their voices echoing harmoniously throughout the hotel's grand lobby. Simultaneously, guests who were present were treated not only to the wonderful Christmas carols, but also to mugs of hot chocolate and a variety of cookies to further enhance the spirit of revelry and giving that Filipinos are known for especially during this time of the year. The hotel's tree lighting is just the beginning of many activities lined up for the Christmas holiday season.

Grand Regal Hotel: Perfect for business travelers

BEING one of the major cities in Philippines, Davao has so much to offer during a well-deserved vacation. The Grand Regal Hotel in Davao is a perfect hotel option for the business travelers, holiday-makers as well as the local residents who want to avail of the best discounted rates this holiday season. One of the finest hotels in Philippines, it has 217 rooms and suites designed to provide you with comfort and convenience in elegance and style. This yuletide season, merry-makers are treated with a special holiday offer. For as low as P3,188 net/room/ 2 nights for Superior Rooms and P3,788 net/room/ 2 nights for Deluxe Rooms, Single or Double Occupancy, you can enjoy a: 2 Nights Holiday Package at Grand Regal Hotel Davao. This package rate is applicable on Saturdays and Sundays only. While staying at Grand Regal Hotel, you will avail of the following inclusions: 10-percent discount on hotel outlets (except Mini Bar), Brasserie for Buffet Breakfast, Poolside Ihaw-Ihaw, Champagne Bar & Montmartre' Café, Kadayawan Restaurant at Casino Filipino, Free use of the Body Garage Fitness Center, Free use of the Swimming Pool, Free entrance to Casino Filipino. This promo is ongoing until Jan. 13, 2008. For inquiries and reservations, you may call (082) 300-8888 or (082)235-0888 local 8355/8367.

The Malayan Plaza's new lobby look

GUESTS of the Quantum Hotels and Resorts at the Malayan Plaza are in for a warmer welcome this new year. The moment they step into the lobby, they will experience the serviced residence's new look, one that is steeped in bolder tones and earthy accents. Inspired by her love for wood, Jeanet Chin Yao drew from the artistic wealth of Indonesian craftsmanship to weave subtly elegant interiors and furnishings for the Malayan Plaza's lobby. Her company, 888 Ethnic Home Furnishing Corp, is one of the country's premier importers of quality Balinese furniture. Their showroom at 9774 Kamagong Street, Makati City is a virtual haven for design and furniture connoisseurs. And with no less than the intricately carved Indonesian craftsmanship called Gapura at her fingertips, Jeanet has made sure that only the finest of furnishings shall greet guests at the Malayan Plaza. Located at the heart of the Ortigas Commercial District, the Malayan Plaza offers furnished studio, 1 bedroom and 2 bedroom units that easily combine aesthetic values, comfort and functionality. Apart from featuring stylish interiors, Malayan Plaza units are also equipped with complete living, dining and kitchen facilities. Rates start at P3,800net inclusive of buffet breakfast for two. For reservations and bookings, call 706-0055, e-mail: sales@quantumsuites.com on log on to www.themalayanplaza-hotel.com.

All-Star Christmas Menu at Polo Bistro

THE POLO BISTRO Pool Lounge of first-class international hotel Marco Polo Davao is introducing a luxurious line of cuisine dubbed as the "All-Star Menu" this Christmas season. It consists of high-end menu items that have won the gold with distinction awards at the Mindanao Culinary Festival (MCF). The All-Star Menu starts with such lavish appetizers as Foie Gras—a terrine of foie gras with grape and apple waldorf salad, famous Beluga Caviar presented on ice sockle served with blinis, pumperknickle, sour cream and vodka, and also Escargot Bourguignon, baked vineyard snails with garlic—plus parsley butter and beaujolais wine. Another addition to these bestsellers is the Beetroot and Shrimp salad—a combination of fresh greens with beetroot, shrimp and cottage cheese in ginger and orange. Then comes the great soup selections: Onion Soup Au Gratin - rich beef broth with caramelized onions, pommery mustard glazed with gruyere cheese—or Fresh Prawn Brisque, a prawn soup enhanced with armagnac and scallop ratatouille. All these can be savored only at the Polo Bistro Pool Lounge, which is located at The Deck, 4th level of Marco Polo Davao (082-2210888 local 7952).

Conway's Bar
813 8888 ext. 7026

Heaven 'n Eggs
(02) 818-2792
(02) 889-3791

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0917-84-sushi

Mey Lin Pot & Noodle House
899 6688 / 899 8999

Kalye Juan
0920-94-kalye

Tong Yang Shabu-Shabu & BBQ Restaurant
899 3388 / 897 4148

Tony Roma's Restaurants
757 1926 / 771 1388

Palaisdaan Restaurant
Barangay Dapdap, Tayabas, Quezon
(042) 793-3529

Island Foot & Body Wellness
899 1234 / 751 8296

Lola Maria Coffeeshop
60 Pioneer St. Mandaluyong City
633-1501 to 10

Cafe Mediterranean
Greenbelt
894-4032

FJ's Grill
24 Timog Ave, Q.C.
376-2559

Bo's Coffee Club

New Orleans
Bldg. 6 Bonifacio St.
Bonifacio High Taguig City
8564785

Kat's Koffee Korner

The Old Spaghetti House
687-6630

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf

North Park
73737

MUSEUM CAFÉ
Ayala Museum, Greenbelt 4
757-3000
757 6000

Causeway Seafood Restaurant
24 Timog Ave, Q.C.
376-2559

Finio Restaurant
415-1278

Kopiroti Davao
(082) 3016009

Clawdaddy Crabhouse and American Grill
636-5679

Chelsea Market & Cafe
909-7011
909-7012

Yuletide tunes vivify spirit of the holidays

By Lilia Borlongan-Alvarez

"SILENT NIGHT," THE HALLMARK of Christmas carols known throughout the world, came about from a succession of coincidences: In 1818, in the village church in Austria, Karl Mauracher, an organ builder, could not finish the repair of the organ—whose bellows were gnawed by mice—in time for the Christmas service.

Desperate, village clergyman Josef Mohr wrote the words for a new song that Franz Xaver Gruber, a schoolmaster from a neighboring village, then set to music. "Silent Night" was first sung during the midnight mass on Christmas Eve that year in the parish church of St. Nikola. Gruber sang the bass part, Mohr the tenor portion, while the choir sang the refrain.

The carol might have been erased from memory had Mauracher not learned it by heart—and made sure it was sung the following Christmas in his parish!

CELERIO. Composed the well-loved Christian carol, "Ang Pasko ay Sumapit."

Wrong perception

The Christian world owes Protestants for many Yuletide tunes that vivify the spirit of the holidays, because music has always been a part of their worship service. Another Christmas carol, "Away in a Manger," was composed in 1895 by Methodist William J. Kirkpatrick.

Its being published in a Lutheran Sunday school book has led to the wrong perception that its lyrics were written by Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism. The truth of the matter is: Its lyricist remains unknown.

"Joy to the World" was composed by Isaac Watts, a Congregational minister. Its lyrics are based on five verses of Psalm 98 in the Old Testament. In 1719, Watts published his "Psalms of David," which contains those verses. In 1839, an American, Lowell Mason, set them to music.

"Hark the Herald Angels Sing" was written in 1739 by Charles Wesley, brother of the founder of the Methodist church. A man of serious mien, he at first requested slow and solemn music for his lyrics. But, after more than a hundred years, English musician William H. Cummings adapted Felix Mendelssohn's 1840 music to a cantata to mark the invention of the printing press by Johann Guttenberg.

Pilgrimage

Philipps Brooks, an American Episcopalian bishop, wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem" in 1868 after embarking on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His inspiration was the sight of Bethlehem at night from the hills of Palestine. Lewis Redner, Brooks' organist in Philadelphia, wrote the melody. He thought of the tune on Christmas Eve and the carol was sung the next day.

The Latin stanzas of "O Come All Ye Faithful," ("Adeste Fideles") were written in 1744 by John Francis Wade, an 18th century British exile who joined a Catholic community in France, where he earned a living by teaching music to children. He published the hymn the following year. After more than a century, Frederick Oakeley, a British clergyman, came up with the English version.

One of the most popular local Christmas carols includes the immortal "Ang Pasko ay Sumapit," composed by National Artist Levi Celerio. It's usually sung as a recessional in the nine-day dawn masses known as Misa de Gallo (or Misa de Aguinaldo, as church liturgy calls it) throughout the country.

FROM left: Lenny Reyes, Tita Trillo, Diana Bergman, Norma Rosado-Escano and the author, with Chari La'O Bagatsing (seated).

Meaningful birthday bash

STREET SMART
Mandy Navasero

RECENTLY, WE CELEBRATED THE birthday of an old friend, Tita Meneses-Trillo, at her La Vigne Bistro and Titania Wine Cellars on Yakal st. The special occasion was attended by friends like Lenny Reyes, Diana Bergman, Norma Rosado-Escano and Chari La'O Bagatsing. We befriended Tita when we were still working in an airline company.

These days, we still get together—to talk about life—and how to make the most of it! We talk about our children and our children's children. Tita is now our Wine Queen, distributing Italian, French, Australian and California wines.

At her birthday bash, dubbed "Simply French," the special guest was Pierre Clerget from Castel, the largest wine producer in France. Introduced that night were wines from Lanquedoc in the southwest of France that truly spiced up the meaningful evening.

Charity

As requested by the birthday girl herself, instead of giving her gifts, guests donated checks for the Orphans of Mother Teresa in Tondo. Tita was visibly touched by the good sum of money her guests raised for charity. At dinner, wine perfectly complemented the *roulade de salmon* and the *confit de conard,* while jazzy love songs, provided by the Soulful Band, played in the background. The feast was capped by a taste of the sweet wine, *Seduction de la Beaugraviere*.

Last Dec. 15, Tita left the country to spend the holidays in Las Vegas, where her youngest daughter, a doctor, works. Her second daughter is a Vegas-based travel magazine editor, while her eldest resides in Marbella, Spain. Indeed, life has been kind to Tita: From being a Baguio girl, she has become the toast of Manila's wine industry!

* * *

Join the Mandy Navasero Photoworkshop in Batanes and learn fashion, architectural, portraiture and fine-art photography. Workshops are scheduled on Feb. 22-25, Mar. 6-10 and Mar. 19-22, with additional dates in April and May next year. Call 899-1767, or email mandy-navasero@yahoo.com.

Loud is in? Defend yourself with the remote control!

By Behn Cervantes

JUDGING FROM THE WAY television hosts and radio announcers these days shout despite the amplification they get from microphones, loud is in! And, since more and more of them are shouting, they probably think it's not just 'in,' but also amusing.

Yes, they must think they're cute, but I beg to disagree. They scream some notches too high, so they're thoroughly tiresome and intolerable—especially in the early morning!

Who started this nonsense, pray tell? Why did this practice become fashionable? Whatever happened to the mellow-voiced announcer who conveyed the news without becoming vulgar and hysterical?

Microphones

And, why doesn't somebody sensible from their network admonish the resident "screamers" that they're neither amusing nor comfortable to hear? That's what expensive microphones are there for, right? Isn't it bad enough that these "screamers" are almost always without substance? Must they always scream their litany of woes?

You turn on your radio or TV set, and you're immediately confronted by newscasters who shout about last night's bad news and the ever-increasing cost of basic goods, as well as the latest show biz gossip. Do they have to ram those dire facts into our defenseless ears? What a way to say "Good morning!"

As a rule, I immediately switch channels and search for something more sober and less hysterical. I mean, who needs those loud harbingers of lamentable news so early in the morning? Petty crimes and political corruption are a given, but I'd rather commence my day with a cheerier perspective on things.

Escapades

They shout about government anomalies, and they do the same about their colleagues' latest peccadilloes in the entertainment world, as though those escapades were such novel events. Don't publicity-seeking starlets do the same predictable things all the time? What else is new?

That reporter commenting about traffic and the constantly-increasing prices in a neighborhood market is a noise pollutant! Why has she been allowed to become a morning irritant?

Fortunately, there exists the remote control. I can either switch to another station—or turn "her" off! There's hope for us, after all. Don't just become a passive victim. Use the remote control It's your first line of defense against all that vocal ordure and offense!

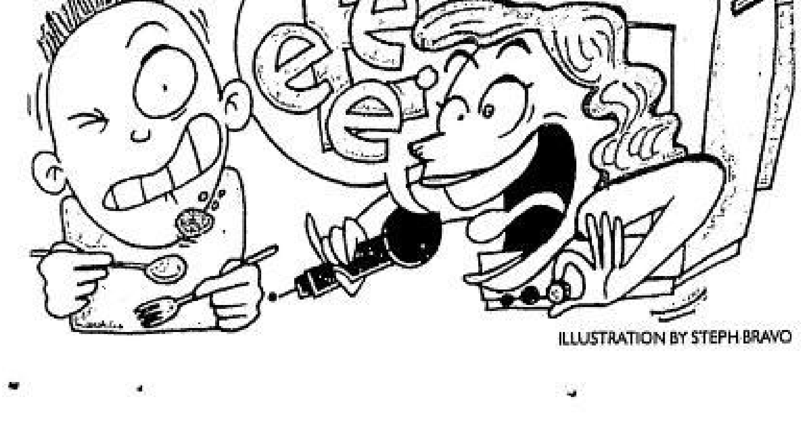
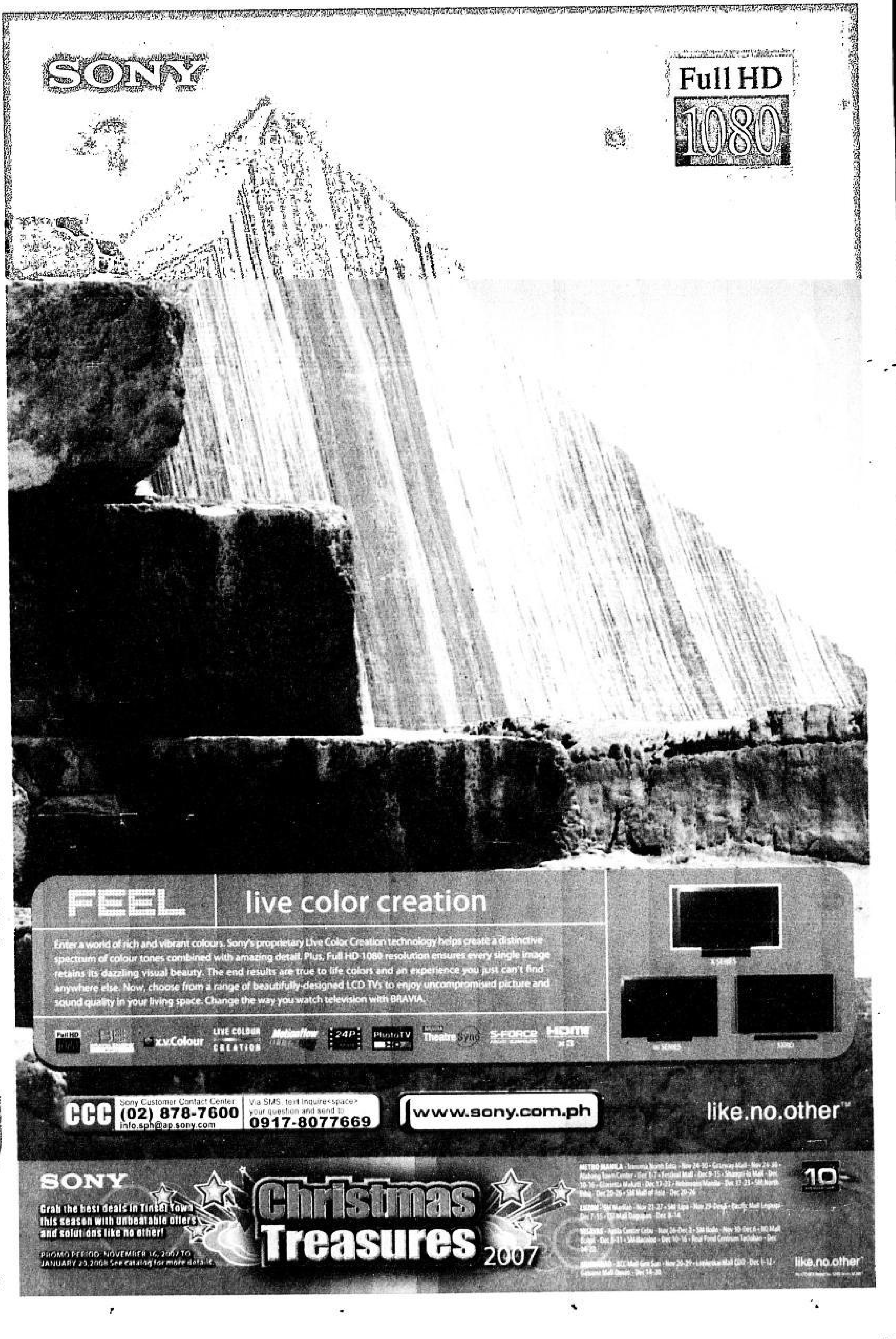


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPH BRAVO



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FEU tops 'Sun Dance Grand Showdown'

MONTAGE

SUN CELLULAR RECENTLY staged the "Sun Dance Grand Showdown" at Robinsons Place, Ermita, with 10 finalist groups hip-hopping their way to a cash prize of P50,000 and a computer showcase for their school.

The highly talented FEU Fern group went home as grand champions, and also won the Texters' Choice award. Dancers from Ramon Magsaysay High School and Arellano University Mandaluyong copped second and first runner-up honors, respectively, winning P20,000 and P30,000.

Adding to the fun and energy level were the sexy vocal group, Kitty Girls, and the Brownman Revival band. Due to the tilt's great success, Sun Cellular is planning to hold a bigger Sun Dance Showdown next year!

THE REAL GROOVE

POPULAR showband hosts New Year's Eve party at Discovery Suites' Serendipity Lounge.

'Dance Fever'

Discovery Suites ushers in the New Year with a fabulous dance party on Dec. 31 at the Serendipity Lounge. Titled "Dance Fever," it features no less than the popular The Real Groove showband, which will be performing dance tunes from the '60s to the '90s, plus contemporary hits. Call (632) 683-8222 loc. 3336. A New Year's Eve gala dinner will also be available at the Columbus Function Room.

'Shrek the Halls'

DreamWorks' "Shrek the Halls" Christmas special will be telecast at 9 p.m. on Dec. 25 on ABC-5. The half-hour special features Shrek and his family and friends. Also catch "The Santa Claus Brothers" at 7 :30 p.m. and the Christmas episode of "Ugly Betty" at 9:30 p.m.

Broadkaster of the Year

For 39 years, Joe Taruc has made a name for himself as a broadcast journalist, with numerous citations attesting to his exceptional dedication to the listening public. This year marked the ultimate accolade in Taruc's career: He was hailed as the Ka Doroy Valencia Brodkaster of the Year at the recent 16th Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) Golden Dove Awards. Taruc's dzRH show, "Damdaming Bayan," was also cited as the Best Public Affairs Program.

TARUC. Ultimate accolade for the seasoned broadcast journalist.

Santa at Starmalls

Meet and greet Santa Claus at these venues: At Metropolis Star Alabang on Dec. 23 (with the Himig Muntinlupa Choir). At Starmall Edsa today and on Dec. 25.

Emily Chua Yap

International pianist Emily Chua Yap treats Filipinos to "An Afternoon of French Piano Music" at the CCP Little Theater on Dec. 30. The pianist's parents, Yap Siong and Conchita, grew up and were raised in the Philippines. Concert repertoire includes works by Ravel, Debussy, Chaminade and Chopin. Emily currently teaches at Randolph College in Virginia, and is working on a CD of the compositions for piano of Kent Holiday.

YAP. Sings in a solo concert at the CCP.

At Richmonde Grill

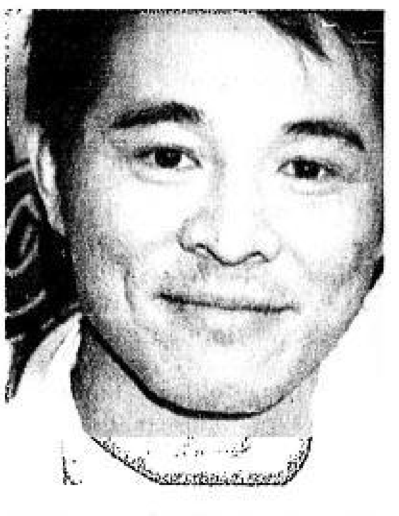
Share your holiday celebrations with loved ones over a feast of sumptuous dishes served during Christmas Eve and Christmas Day at The Richmonde Hotel's Richmonde Grill. A culinary feast will also be served on New Year's Eve. Call 689-8412.

'3 Days of Darkness'

The adult-horror indie movie, "3 Days of Darkness," is showing at Robinsons Galleria, Manila and Bacolod. The Filmless Films production's stars include Katya Santos, Gwen Garci and Precious Adona.

Jet Li

Jet Li joins host Anjali Rao and a live studio audience for a special edition of CNN's "Talk Asia" at 8:30 p.m. today. China's highest-paid actor talks about his stellar career and humanitarian work. Replay on Dec. 23 at 10 p.m.



LI. Guests on CNN's "Talk Asia" today.

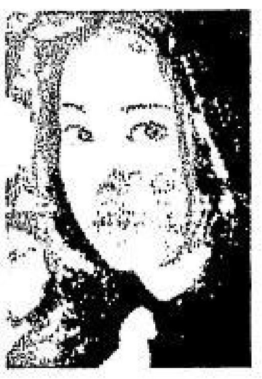
Movies on TV

On HBO today at 7 a.m., "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire." Tomorrow at 1 p.m., "National Lampoon's European Vacation." Dec. 24 at 11 p.m., "The Nativity Story." Dec. 25, "Fun with Dick and Jane." Dec. 26 at 3 p.m., "Pride and Prejudice." Dec. 27 at 9 a.m., "Children of A Lesser God." Dec. 28 at 9 a.m., "The Education of Little Tree."

On Cinemax today at 11 p.m., "Apollo 13." Tomorrow at 7 a.m., "Houdini." Dec. 24 at 3 p.m., "White Christmas." Dec. 25 at 7 a.m., " Gladiator." Dec. 26 at 1 p.m., "Wyatt Earp." Dec. 27 at 11 p.m., "First Knight." Dec. 28 at 9 a.m., "Alfie."

Gina, Angelu and Harlene in 'TVM' Hong Kong

Harlene Bautista-Sarmenta, one of the original actresses of the New Voice Company's Filipino version of "The Vagina Monologues," returns to Eve Ensler's critically-acclaimed hit play when it goes to Hong Kong on Dec. 30, in cooperation with Springtime Productions and Eric Quizon. The popular play will be performed at the Shatin Hall of the New Territories at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.



ALAJAR (LEFT), BAUTISTA-SARMENTA (RIGHT) AND DE LEON. Topbill NVC's "The Vagina Monologues" in Hong Kong on Dec. 30.

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More viewers weigh in on dubious awards

By Nestor U. Torre

OUR RECENT "ANTI-award" column appears to have rubbed off on some readers in different ways. People who agreed with us decried the loss of reliable standards of quality resulting from bogus awards. On the other hand, there were these who maintained that fake awards shouldn't be junked, but improved.

We found a third sector's views even more interesting: It was comprised of readers and colleagues who shared *their own stories* involving all sorts of awards.

On some awards for live performances: "I know for a fact that jurors don't even bother to watch all of the performances nominated for awards—they just rely on the opinions of other people they know. How then could they make reliable choices?

Bottom line

"The bottom line to be a good judge is to at least view or listen to all of the nominees. If you rely on others' suggestions, how do you know that they're being objective or even know what they're talking about? You don't."

Another "prestigious" award elicited this comment: "I suspect that the decisions handed down are strongly influenced by a clique mentality, so they aren't believable, either. Even worse, I am told by insiders that some judges have an implicit agreement with the winners they choose: Next time around, the winners will bat for the former judge, so he or she will then become a winner of the award! Talk about mutual backscratchers!

"Some 'winners' of bought awards are really *kapal*. They know they are undeserving, but they boast about their 'victory' in the media in a big way (even coming out with plugs and ads). I hope people can see through their phony act!"

Other points of view: "Awards are important to stars because they make them look 'legitimate.' Even if they aren't talented, their awards give the *impression* they are. So, it's no surprise that most everybody wants to get an award, whether they deserve to get it or not!"

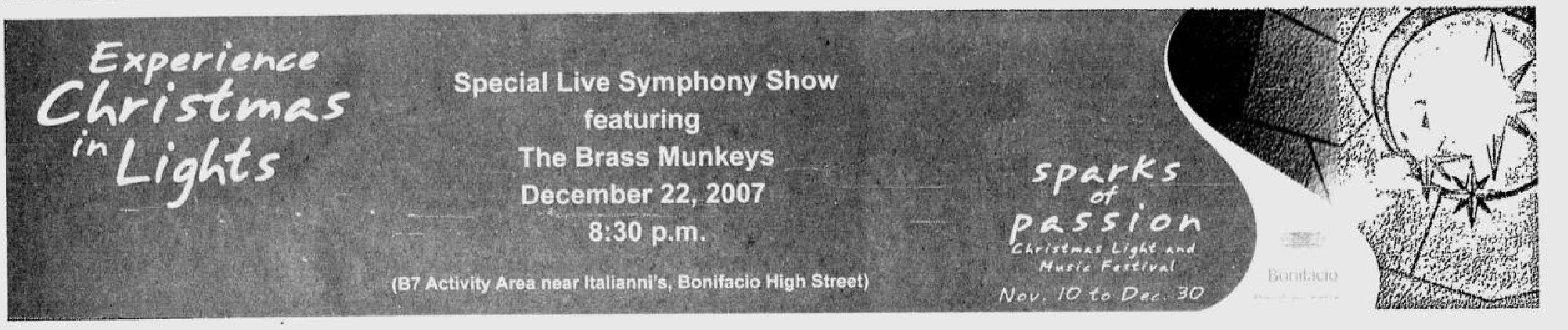
Deserving winners

"It's bad when inferior talents win, because they rob those awards of their value. It's unfair to past deserving winners to be put on the same level as the undeserving! Past winners are the ones who should complain the loudest. They could even give back their trophies to protest the insult!"

Indeed, a veteran actor shared that he wanted to do just that, because some of the trophies he has won have lost their luster and prestige in the past few years. Ever the optimist, however, he is biding his time, hoping that reforms will be instituted and some awards can regain their lost glory.

He reminded us of the long period when a festival kept giving its Best Actor trophy to an obviously hammy performer. In time, however, the festival realized it was going downhill in the public's view, and finally tried to set things right.

Could this happen to other dubious awards, as well? Let's give them one last chance next year. —Have an ever hopeful Christmas!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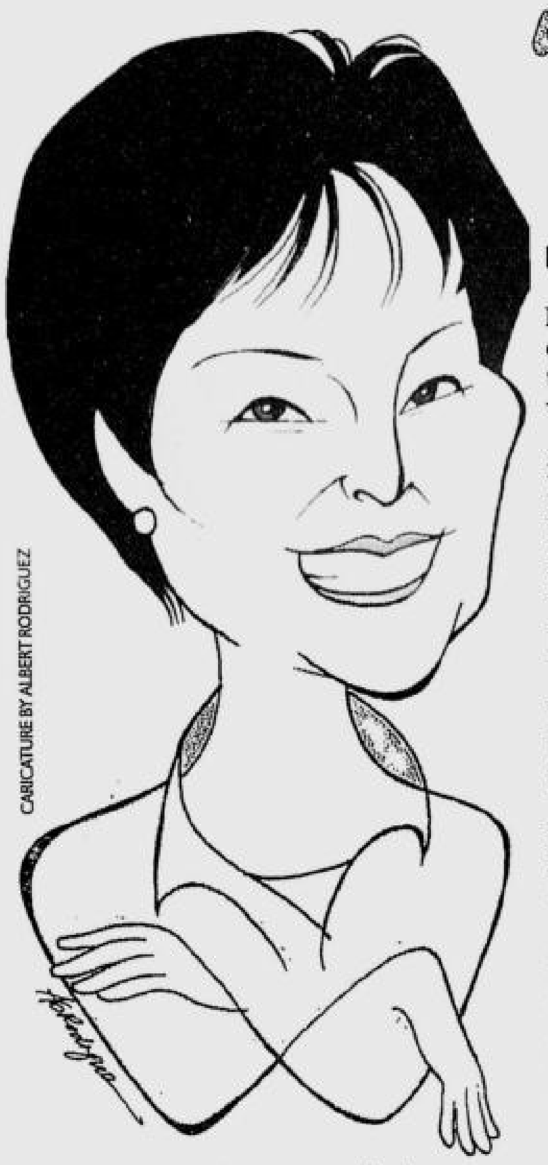
It's the season to say, 'Thank you'


CARICATURE BY ALBERT RODRIGUEZ

ANSON-ROA. Values recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land most of all.

By Nestor U. Torre

NOW THAT CHRISTMAS IS ONLY A FEW days away, it's time to think, not just of gifts to buy for our loved ones, but also for other ways to vivify the true spirit of the season.

One suggestion is the height of simplicity itself: Look back at your life and list all of the people who have helped you become a better person through the years—and then, reach out to them and express your heartfelt thanks.

Reticence

All too often, we may feel grateful to a wonderful person in our lives, but we let the moment slide, until it's forgotten. That's a pity, because only one person is served: You feel good about being helped, but the person who's helped you is prevented by your reticence or forgetfulness from basking in the sunlit warmth of your gratitude.

We got this idea from the yearend "report" a good friend annually sends to all of his loved ones and colleagues, not just here but all over the world. In the annual yearender, he looks back at his activities—and, most important of all, thanks the individuals who helped him along the way.

We heartily recommend this way of reaching out, because we were among those our friend thanked—and it was a great feeling that others should also experience. So, do take the time to say—"Thank you!"

In line with this suggestion, we asked some people we know to express their gratitude to individuals they hold particularly dear this year, and these were their responses:

Dynamic relations

Boots Anson-Roa: My special thanks go to Rose Galang of Ephesus Travel, who recently invited me to visit the Holy Land to host the 50th anniversary celebration of the dynamic relations between the Philippines and Israel.

One of the historical facts I discovered was that, during World War II, our country served as a sanctuary for Jews escaping from the Holocaust! The pilgrimage was a dream come true for me, and resulted in a deep renewal of faith that moves me to this day. Thanks, Rose!

Ricky Davao: Thank you, Pete Lacaba, for "allowing" me to sing your *salinawit* (Filipino translations of pop standards and classics) on different occasions. You know how much I love to sing—so, thanks!

Nelson Caruncho: Thanks to my "insightful" friend, Natalie Tanchip, for reading my

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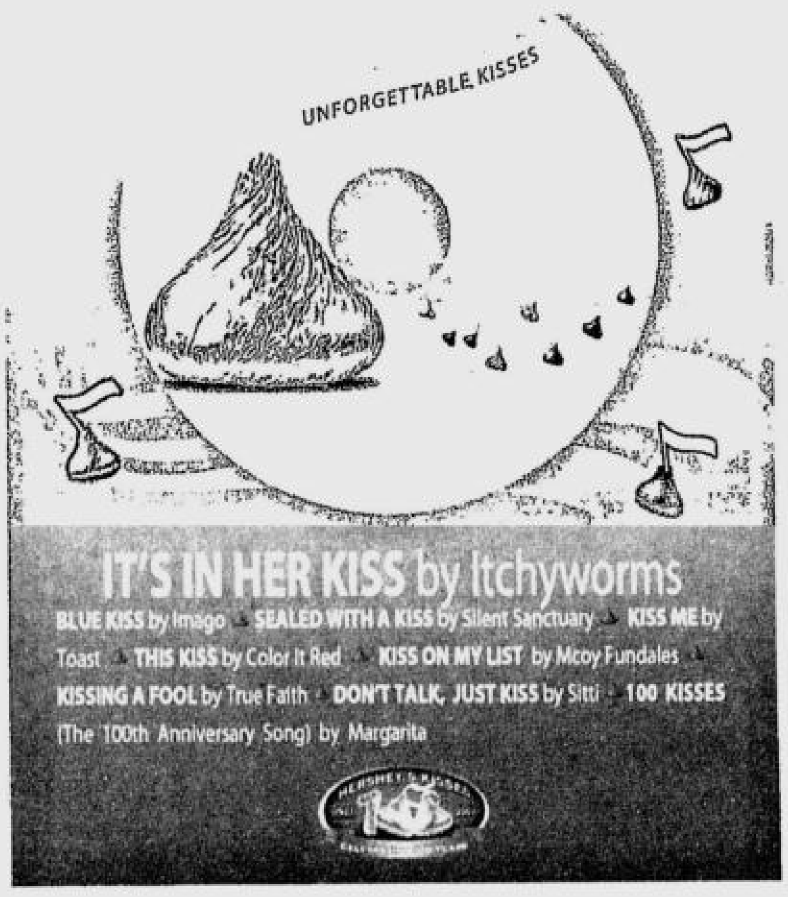

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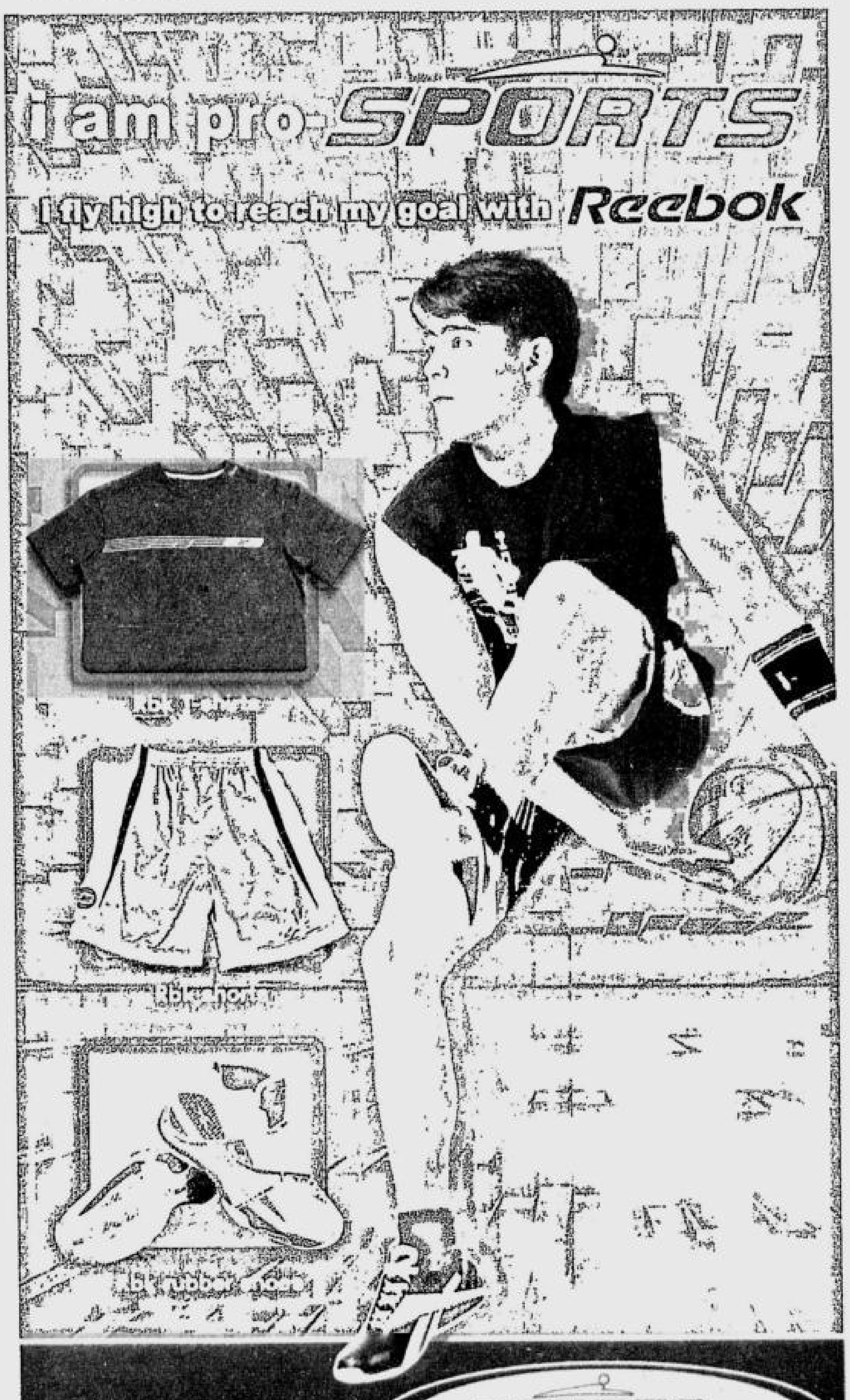
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'Wild girls' dominate show biz headlines in 2007

LOS ANGELES—A BEVY OF girls gone wild dominated the show biz headlines in 2007, but the death of former Playboy Playmate, Anna Nicole Smith, loomed over all of them like a cautionary tale. Pop music stars, Hollywood actresses, the talented and the talentless all found themselves in the news for the wrong reasons this year, when the theory that there is no such thing as bad publicity was severely tested.

Smith's death from accidental drug overdose in a Florida hotel room in February at age 39 sparked a worldwide media frenzy, even if no one could precisely explain why. Famed for her marriage to an octogenarian oil tycoon in 1994, Smith once appeared to be on the road to supermodel status after she replaced Claudia Schiffer as a Guess Jeans model in the early 1990s.

LOHAN. Repeated offenses.

Struggle

But, the public blonde-bombshell persona unravelled over the course of the following decade, the sudden death in the Bahamas in 2006 of her beloved son, Daniel, occurring just months before her own demise. Smith's struggle to find happiness was mirrored by the tortured 12 months endured by former pop princess, Britney Spears, and actress Lindsay Lohan.

Spears and Lohan were two of the biggest names struggling to get their lives—and careers—back on track after a year, when they seemed to lurch from one lurid tabloid headline to the next. Both stars checked in and out of rehabilitation centers more than once this year, with Spears's increasingly erratic behavior ultimately seeing her stripped of custody of her two children following her divorce from Kevin Federline.

NICOLE Richie and Paris Hilton have both spent time behind bars.

Lohan, 21, found herself in the news after being discovered passed out in a hotel corridor following the Golden Globes in January—a red flag warning that was followed by the now customary stint in rehab. Yet, it got worse when Lohan was caught for drunk driving and drug possession in May, only to be nabbed for the same offenses in July. She eventually escaped a lengthy prison sentence, spending only 84 minutes behind bars.

A film studio executive blamed Lohan and other young celebrities' travails on "Hollywood's compulsion to turn child actors into products, plus a frenzied 21st-century media culture that has made Lohan and other celebs into exotic prey in flashbulb cages." While Lohan escaped with less than two hours behind bars, hotel heiress Paris Hilton was not so fortunate.

The reality television star and professional "celebutante" was shell-shocked after a Los Angeles judge sentenced her to a 45 days prison in an alcohol-related reckless driving case in May. However, the real drama was still to come. Released into home detention after spending only three days behind bars, she was swiftly hauled sobbing back to court, where a judge ordered her returned to prison. She emerged from incarceration to a blizzard of flashbulbs in late June.

Ironically, Hilton's costar, Nicole Richie, also spent time behind bars—for a less-than-harrowing 82 minutes—after being caught driving under the influence down the wrong way of a Los Angeles freeway. Richie, the 25-year-old daughter of singer Lionel Richie, was also fined $2,048 and placed on probation for three years.

But, the list of troubled celebrities extended beyond the Los Angeles bubble, most notably with British soul singer Amy Winehouse, best known for her autobiographical single "Rehab." Although Winehouse enjoyed phenomenal success with her breakthrough album, "Back to Black"—which has helped earn her six Grammy nominations—the talented 24-year-old singer's life has, at times, appeared to be hurtling off the rails.

SPEARS. Struggling to get her life and career back on track.

Tabloid photos

Winehouse was arrested for drug possession in Norway in October, but worse was to come the following month when the singer's husband, Blake Fielder-Civil, was remanded in custody for conspiring to pervert the course of justice.

Winehouse's career has nose-dived as a result, and a 17-date British tour was cut short for "health reasons" after a shambolic opening gig that saw the singer stumbling around the stage and swearing at the audience.

"The constant bombardment photographers at her home has increased anxiety and caused disturbance," her spokesperson confirmed, saying the singer was now undergoing medical treatment. *AFP*

Matchbox Twenty returns with more polished sound

By Noelani Torre

FOR A BAND THAT'S OFTEN DISmissed by critics as lightweight—despite the impressive number of albums they've sold—Matchbox Twenty has certainly got a lot of staying power. Ever since the release of their debut album, "Yourself or Someone Like You," in 1996, the band has been a regular and ubiquitous presence on the charts.

They may not get a lot of love from the critics, but Matchbox Twenty has never had a problem connecting with the rest of the general public. A testament to this success are three multi-platinum albums and the 28 million records that they've sold thus far.

MATCHBOX TWENTY. Staying power.

Solo career

When singer/frontman Rob Thomas went on to forge a successful solo career, however—in 2000, he won three Grammys for collaborating with Santana on "Smooth" and, in 2005, he released his hit debut solo album, "Someone to Be"—it looked like the beginning of the end for Matchbox Twenty.

The release of a greatest hits collection late this year only serves to enforce this perception, but if you take the trouble to listen to "Exile on Mainstream" (and if you like their music, you should), you'll realize that things aren't over yet!

A play on the title of the Rolling Stones album, "Exile on Main Street," "Exile on Mainstream" is also a wry acknowledgement of the group's status as a middle-of-the-road kind of band. "There's a sense that somehow, a band like us should be apologetic for making music for the masses," muses Thomas. "But, I think it's great that we can hit a chord that means something to us—that also means something to someone else! That's really what it's all about!"

Playlist

The band has had quite a few hits in the course of 10 years, and the biggest ones are included in this collection's playlist. The album doesn't just showcase Matchbox Twenty's greatest successes, however, it will also give you a taste of the band's future.

The first six songs of the 17-track collection are brand new songs. The band—made up of Thomas, former drummer now guitarist Paul Doucette, guitarist Kyle Cook and bassist Brian Yale—had originally planned to include only one new single. "We got together, and we fought about what was important to us now—then, we started to write," Thomas shares. "Suddenly, it was like, 'This is fun! Maybe we should do a new album!' So, we ended up with the best of both worlds!"

The new material sounds different—and it was made differently, as well. In the past, Thomas would do most of the writing, but with the group's new songs, everybody shares the credit. "I don't think we could have gone on if we didn't change the dynamic of the band," discloses Doucette. "Matchbox Twenty used to be about Rob and his overly outspoken background band. Now, it's Rob, Kyle, Paul and Brian!"

Signature combination

The first song on the playlist is the aptly titled "How Far We've Come." Driving and anthemic, with the group's signature combination of classic stadium rock and '90s Pearl Jam-ish alt-rock sound, the song sounds better crafted than their old material.

Despite its grim sentiments—"The world is burning to the ground"—it feels lighter, as does the next number, "I'll Believe You When," a bright, '60s-style piece. Hook-laden, cleanly produced and simply-worded, Matchbox Twenty's new songs bode well for the future of this exiled-on-mainstream band.

Two heads are better than one for Tarog and Antipuesto

By Rica Arevalo

VIEWERS AT THE RECENT CINEMA One film festival raved about "Confessional," the feature-length directorial debut of Jerrold Tarog and Ruel Dahis Antipuesto. Tarog is the musical scorer of such acclaimed films as "Kubrador" and "Kadin," while Antipuesto dabbles in cinematography.

How did "Confessional" come about? Tarog replies: "Our initial plan was to do a more complicated project, but we couldn't find a producer for it. But, I was itching to do a feature film, so we thought of an easier project that wouldn't require a lot of outside funding. Ruel won the 2006 Sinulog documentary contest, and I won the following year, so in a way, "Confessional" completes a trilogy of sorts."

Antipuesto adds, "We had long discussions about why many middle-class Filipinos aren't so enthusiastic about local movies, so we came up with this 'experiment.'" The film, they say, targets the indie crowd—and people who consider most Pinoy films *bakya*.

Intelligence

Tarog explains, "Instead of dumbing down our cinematic taste just to attract the widest audience possible, we wanted to see if our target audience would respond to our film if we tried to engage their intelligence." The result of Tarog and Antipuesto's musing tells the story of a small-time filmmaker, Ryan Pastor (played by Tarog himself), who goes to Cebu to film the Sinulog festival—and stumbles upon a "reality" he didn't want to pursue!

The use of nonprofessional actors was deliberate. "We wanted to create the illusion of reality—that the main character was interviewing real people," Tarog (who helmed the Gawad CCP-winning short film, "Carpool") reasons. "'Confessional' is probably the first and last time you'll see me in a lead role! I dislike the fact that I'm 'acting' in front of a camera, but we had little choice back then!"

Tarog and Antipuesto's shift into directing worked without a hitch. Antipuesto is aware of the limitations of indie filmmaking: "Even when I work as a cinematographer, I always have the mindset of a director or producer. When you have limited resources, you always end up doing multiple tasks."

Inspiration

Tarog, on the other hand, says film and cinema always go hand in hand. He shares: "I have been making short films since college, even when I was working on a film score. Stanley Kubrick's statement about the structural similarity of the two art forms continues to be my inspiration!"

"Confessional" is guerrilla filmmaking at its best. Antipuesto and Tarog had to borrow a skull from a cemetery, because they couldn't "recreate" one. Another time, they had to pretend to be tourists taking video footage onboard a ferry—because they didn't have the necessary permit to shoot in the vessel!

The duo wants Filipino viewers to see the film first before they take "Confessional" to the international festival circuit. The movie's impressive awards haul at Cinema One included wins for Best Picture, Best Directors, Best Screenplay, Best Editing, Best Sound, Best Supporting Actor (for Publio Briones III), and a special award from Star Cinema.

* * *

Erratum: The person in the photo accompanying Rica Arevalo's Ronnie del Carmen article last Saturday was not the Filipino animator from Pixar. Our apologies.

It's the season to say, 'Thank you'

From page H1

VALDES. Happy about perceptive reviews.

mind and giving me the watch I've been saving up for!

Tita Muñoz: "I especially want to thank Lito, one of my occasional drivers. He had a good education but has fallen into tough times, so he's had to take on all sorts of part-time jobs. I thank him because he does more than just drive me around.

"When I'm feeling low and instruct him to drive me, say, to Los Baños, we start all sorts of conversations in the car: I ask him, 'If you had a million pesos, what would you do with it?' We learn a lot from each other, and we have a good time. Thanks, Lito!"

Behn Cervantes: "My special thanks this year go to my niece, Rovi Marquez, for "adopting" me in my "dotage." Recently, we spent a wonderful month and a half in Cebu—in the town of Santander, we discovered a beautiful beach, and our stay there was truly memorable—thanks to Rovi. She goes out of her way to make sure that I am cared for. When I had my cataract operation, she flew in from Cebu to see that I was OK. Thank you, Rovi!"

Au Cobarrubias: "This year, I want to thank—myself! Don't get me wrong, I'm not an egotist. it's just that I'm glad I've learned how to be more open—to everything. I'm grateful to myself for fortifying my life with love, not only as an emotion but also as my sense of being—so, I not only feel love, I *am* love."

Laurice Guillen: "I especially want to thank my husband, Johnny Delgado, and my daughters, Anna and Ina, for throwing my first ever surprise birthday party on the occasion of my turning 60 earlier this year. Johnny footed the bill and our daughters arranged everything (Johnny chose the menu). Usually, I'm the one who prepares everything—so, it was wonderful that they took over this time—and I was free to just enjoy it!"

DAVAO. Grateful for the chance to sing.

Mitch Valdes: "I know you don't want to be singled out, but honestly, the best thing that happened to me this year was to read the perceptive reviews you and Behn wrote of my Mandarin show.

"So, I would like to thank you, *Kuya* NUT and *Kuya* Behn!—Because, it's not the review of my performance that's important, but your insights into what I was doing. The two of you got the *katas*, the heart of what I wanted to say and share. And, of course, due to your high credibility, the people came. Thanks!"

ROA (left) with Galang.

Christmas is hard work for world's oldest boy group

VIENNA—IF YOU THINK CHRISTMAS IS stressful, spare a thought for the Vienna Boys' Choir. The 100 or so 10- to 14-year-olds who make up the "Wiener Saengerknaben," as they are known here, sing in an astonishing 300 concerts a year.

But, it is during the festive season that their workload is heaviest. In fact, their list of Christmas engagements would probably exhaust even the most hard-nosed department-store Santa. This month alone, the world's most famous boys' choir is doing a 15-stop tour of Germany and also performing in 13 dates in the United States. Next month, they're off on a two-week tour of South Korea.

Both at home and abroad, it seems the boys have come to epitomize Austrian Christmas as much as the countless Yuletide markets and endless "Gluehwein" (mulled wine) stands that are dotted throughout Vienna's snow-filled streets at this time of year.

Delicate vocal chords

For adults, the workload would be gruelling enough. For the delicate vocal chords of pre-pubescent boys, it would be criminal, were it not for the fact that the Vienna Boys' Choir is actually not one, but four different choirs. Each choir is named after a composer with close links to the ensemble whose roots stretch back to 1498: Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Bruckner.

Austria's national tourist board recently decided to market them as the world's "oldest boy group," a label that the choir itself is uncomfortable with. "The workload is heavy," concedes artistic director Gerald Wirth.

Furthermore, the training is among the best in the world. "It's very intensive. We have 12-14 hours of choir practice a week. That's at least two hours a day, plus individual voice coaching," says Wirth. The Vienna Boys' Choir ranks among the Austrian capital's musical elite, alongside the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic, with whom the boys perform regularly. And the choir—all boarders—is housed in an 18th-century palace set in the city's oldest baroque gardens.

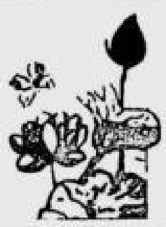
Real interest

"We simply test the health of a boy's voice, his feeling for rhythm and pitch, and we try to find out whether there's real interest. We want children for whom music is really important." For a boarding school of such standing and caliber, the fees are hardly exorbitant, amounting to just $103 a month. Around 75 percent of the choristers are Austrian-born.

The intensity of spending their formative years in such a tight—knit community forms a bond that connects them-for the rest of their lives! *AFP*

VIENNA BOYS' CHOIR. Performs in an astonishing 300 concerts a year!

Lotus Pond



R. Valencia and S. Bismark

Giving and receiving

GIFT-GIVING and receiving can be wonderful if done in the right context. Here are timely reminders:

In gift-giving

- A gift should come from the heart. Material things only bring superficial pleasure. Love makes the act truly heartwarming.
- The best gifts can't be bought or sold—like love, wisdom, concern, caring and kindness. Without buying anything, Jesus gave us the greatest gift of all!
- Gifts are not bound by time. They can be given any time.
- Gifts are not price-controlled. A gift's value does not increase with its price. Love gives it value and meaning.
- Giving gifts should not be an obligation—it should be a reflection of sincerity and a sign of affection. It should not be given merely to fulfill a requirement.

In receiving

- Don't judge the gift by its material price. Its real importance is not on its price tag. If you crave for material things, all you get is superficial joy—which doesn't have much value.
- Desire always leads to disappointment. Big expectations can lead to great frustrations.
- There's joy in receiving, but there's greater joy in giving. It's more fulfilling to be a giver than a taker.
- Don't ask for gifts. Putting pressure on people to give you something doesn't signify love.

Gifts should bring inner peace and happiness.

Merry Christmas to all!

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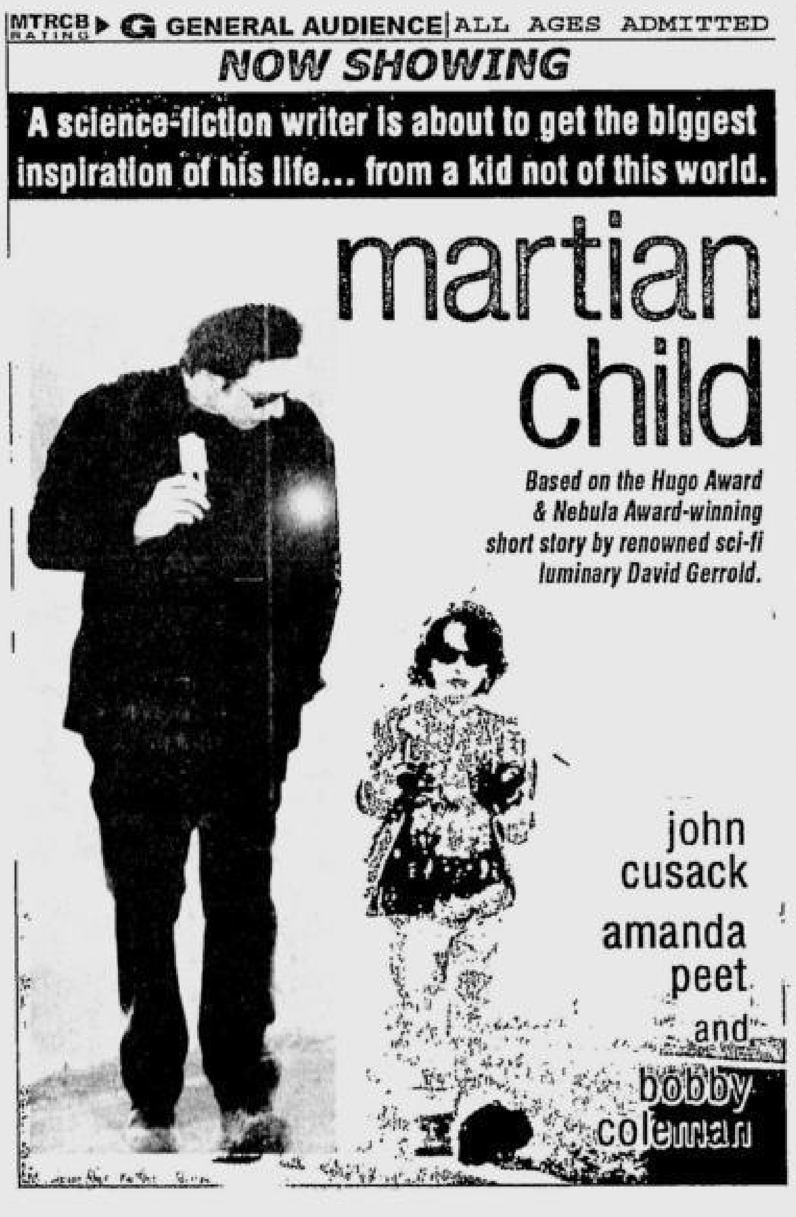

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BREASTFEEDING
BEST FOR BABY
BEST FOR MOM

Breastfeeding tips for career moms

Maternal & Child Health survey by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 1999 cited that "mother working" (19.1 percent) was the second biggest reason lactating mothers stopped breastfeeding. These working mothers think they couldn't handle the demands of their busy careers while breastfeeding their child.

But this is not the case with seasoned TV host and sportscaster Chiqui Roa-Puno. For her, breastfeeding while working is just another challenge to conquer. With a killer schedule as ANC News Anchor, host of Mommy Academy on IBC 13 and MomWorks on the Lifestyle Channel, plus news coverages, tapings, out-of-town shoots and event hostings -- Chiqui is still able to fulfill her duties at home.

A wife and mother of three, Chiqui proudly swears she was able to breastfeed her kids Randy (13) and Nick (12) when they were babies and now, 8-month-old daughter Sabrina whom she currently breastfeeds.

KNOW MORE ABOUT IT!

Chiqui says getting as much information helped her prepare to once again breastfeed successfully. Being in touch with women who have undergone the same thing helped her keep going. "I'm lucky I didn't really have to pick-up the phone and look for people who can help me. because I am already working with them," she says.

These individuals. she says, guided her on the importance of proper nutrition for a breastfeeding mother. "Proper nutrition is very important when you're breastfeeding because you are the baby's source of food. Keeping your diet balanced and healthy is the only way to ensure you provide your child the best."

For those who want to ensure they get all the essential nutrients they need, a maternal milk supplement especially formulated for breastfeeding mothers can provide the much-needed nutritional boost. These, she says, can work together to help ensure she produces enough nutrient-rich breast milk.

GET SUPPORT AT WORK AND AT HOME

"It's also important to let the people (you work with) know you're breastfeeding so that they can help. In most cases, they are very supportive. You also have to have someone who you can count on at home. You should train and teach your *yayas*."

But like any other challenge, it still depends on the mother to make her breastfeeding experience successful. "Breastfeeding, especially for working moms, means having to pump your milk several times a day when you're in the office. To make sure you cope with the demands of your profession, you have to effectively manage your time and plan ahead," Chiqui adds.

Breastfeeding mom Chiqui Roa-Puno with daughter Sabrina

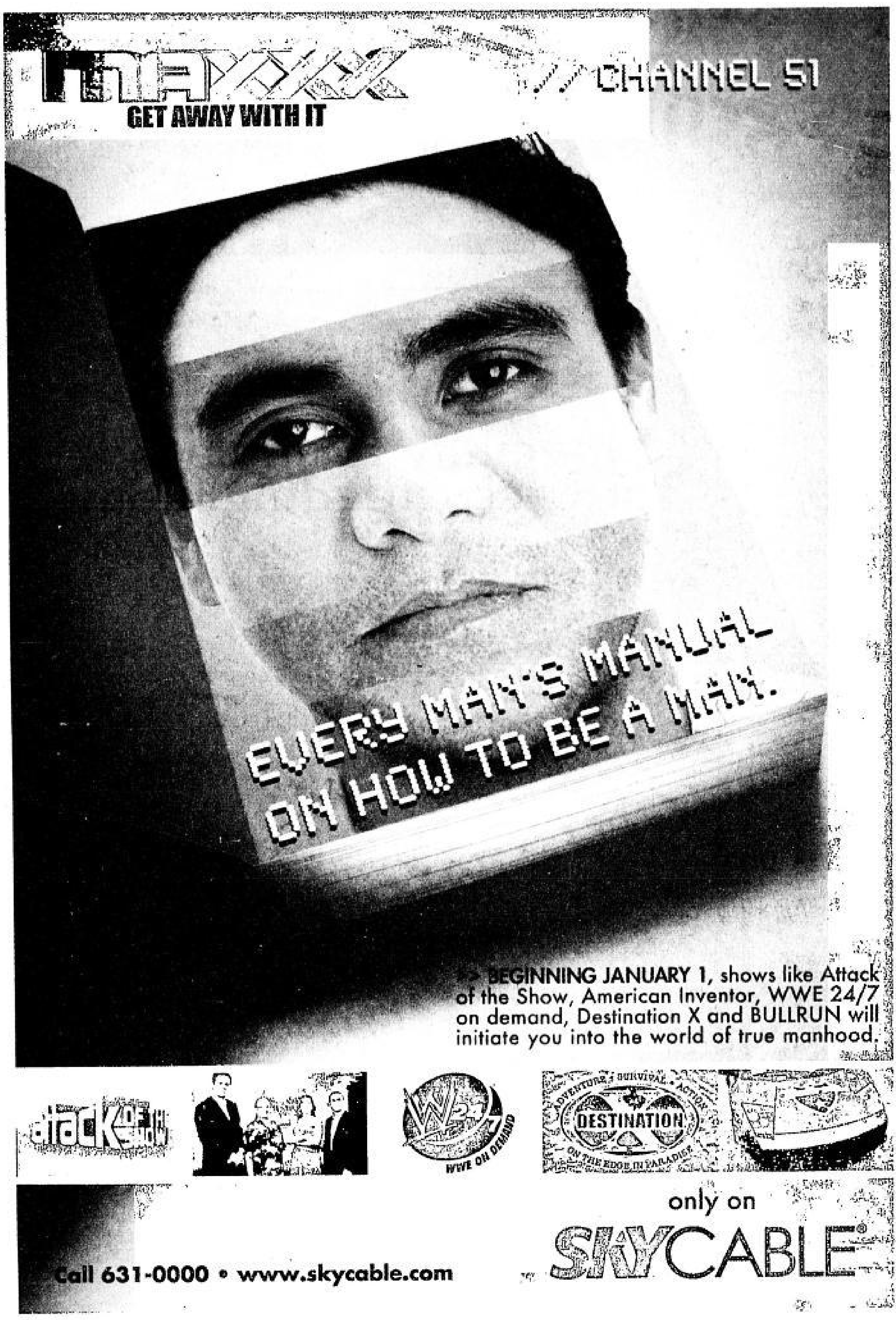
A STRONG COMMITMENT

"Breastfeeding is a commitment. Make the decision early on during your pregnancy, and stick to that decision," she says.

"When Sabrina came, it was just like going back to being a first-time breastfeeding mother; the last time I breastfed was more than 10 years ago. Again, I underwent adjustments but I just went on with it. You have to be determined."

For career moms like her, Chiqui believes good health and proper nutrition is very important. Moms must keep themselves healthy. In her case, she has maintained her enthusiasm in a variety of sports, dances professionally, and spends quality time with her family for relaxation.

An active lifestyle combined with proper diet can help breastfeeding moms tremendously. Chiqui believes making the breastfeeding experience a success is a challenge that any mom can easily manage. "Just keep in mind that it's one of the best things you can do for your child. It's a fleeting opportunity to give your child the best, a perfect bonding experience that comes only once in your baby's lifetime," says Chiqui.



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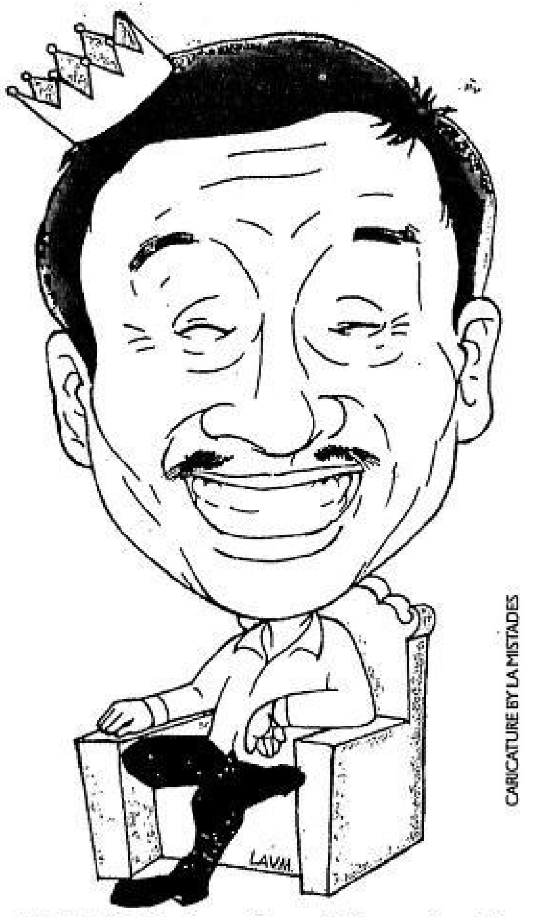
Unique combination of abilities keeps Dolphy on top

By Nestor U. Torre



DOLPHY. Made good use of his penchant for tweaking current events.

AFTER NORA AUNOR AND VILMA SANTOS, it's Comedy King Dolphy's turn to play the Filmography Game and recall the highlights and sidelights of his exceedingly long and eventful career as a film-TV star:

Starting way, *way* back at the very beginning, Dolphy was first noticed by moviegoers in 1953 in "Sa Isang Sulyap Mo, Tita," starring the then popular love team of Pancho Magalona and Tita Duran. Dolphy was also featured in 1954's "answer" to the "Tita" movie, "Sa Isang Halik Mo, Pancho."

Most significant

That early, Dolphy was clearly on his way, because in 1954, he acted in five other films, the most significant of which is "Jack en Jill," where he played the "male" (gay) lead, opposite Lolita Rodriguez in a tomboyish role.

Dolphy's first lead performance clicked with moviegoers, and set the pattern for quite a number of his subsequent starrers, like "Kurdapya" and "Facifica Falayfay," where he also played flamboyant cross-dressers.

Thus did Dolphy prove anew that gay can become gold at the box office. But, he didn't rest on his sequined laurels. Quite smartly, he realized that the way to a long and stellar career was in not being typecast in gay roles—no matter how popular they were.

So, Dolphy performed in musicals, where his vaudeville-honed singing and dancing skills were showcased, and he also started acting in spoofs of *komiks* characters in films like "Tansan the Mighty." Forays into fantasy also began to appear, like "Si Lucio at Si Miguel," 1962.

Spoofs

Then came the spoofs of James Bond movies, like "Genghis Bond" (1965), "Dr. Yes" and "Dolpinger." From James Bond, it was a short step to spoofs of other secret agents, as in "Dolpong Istanbul," "Dolpong Scarface" and "Napoleon Doble at ang Sexy Six."

Since secret agents were supposed to be ladykillers, Dolphy's own "macho" image came to the fore in starrers like "Alyas Don Juan." In addition, Dolphy occasionally played bemusing retardates in "Dakilang Tanga" and other flicks. Plus more *komiks* superhero characters like "Captain Barbell" and—would you believe?— "Darna Kuno." Even more far-out was "Adolpong Hitler"!

Dolphy also made good use of his penchant for tweaking current events in movies like "Sungit Conference," a comedic twist of the Summit Conference held in Manila.

Through these and other stellar ploys, Dolphy became very popular, indeed. Then came his hit "John & Marsha" TV sitcom and its big-screen version, the first of some seven sequels.

Horror-comedy hits came by way of "Ompong Satanasia" and "Black Magic." Dolphy also took to acting with child stars, in heartwarming movies like "Daddy's Little Darling" and (one of the best in his career) "Ang Tatay Kong Nanay" with pint-sized superstar Niño Muhlach, directed by Lino Brocka.

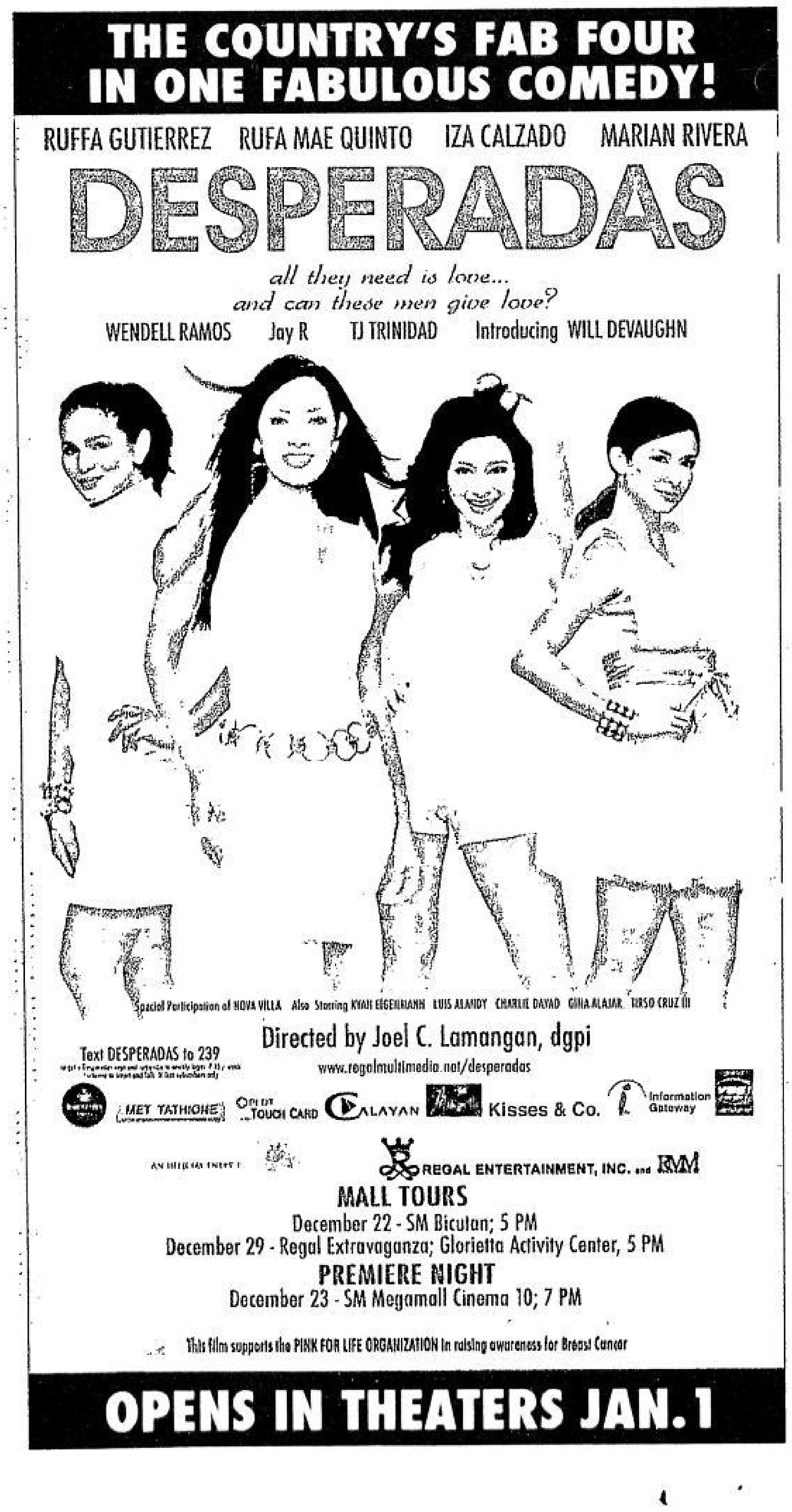
Substantial role

Speaking of quality, Dolphy also distinguished himself in "Cyrano de Bergerac," but his fans rejected him in that more substantial role, so he steered clear of "serious" roles after that—with the exception of "Once Upon A Time," where he played a morose folk-mythic character (a *tikbalang*).

In the '90s, Dolphy made quite a number of "Home Along Da Riles" movies, which banked on the success of his sitcom with the same title. And, in 2000, he put his advanced age to good advantage by playing the tragicomic title character in "Markova, Comfort Gay."

Despite the generally "commercial" run of his movie career, Dolphy has gained not just commercial success, but also top performance marks due to his unique combination of abilities and his innate artistic sensitivity.

Yes, his humor can sometimes be broad—and even "brown"—but it's always delivered with tongue firmly in cheek, and a knowing gimlet eye perpetually cocked askance at the human condition!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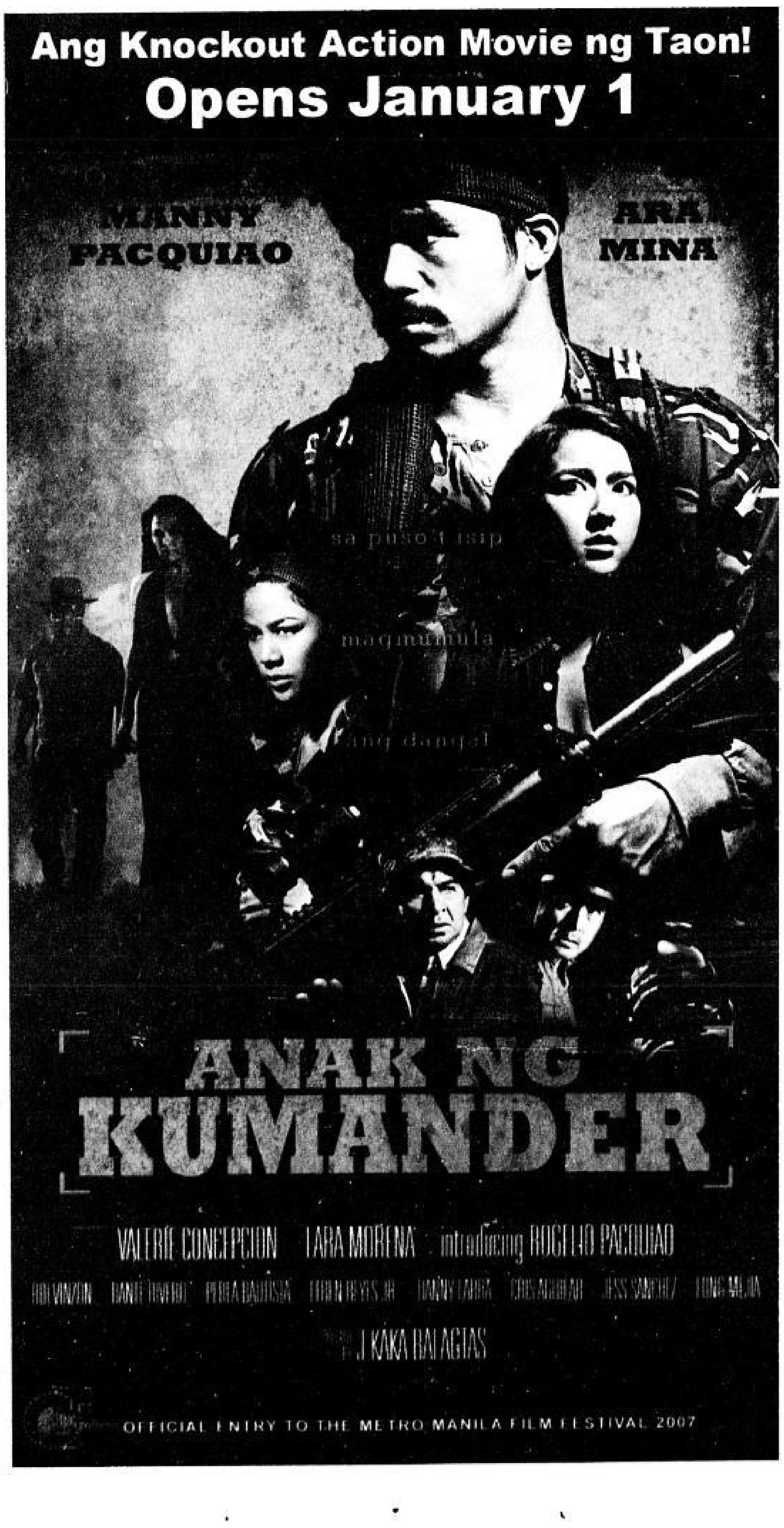
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ONLY IN HOLLYWOOD

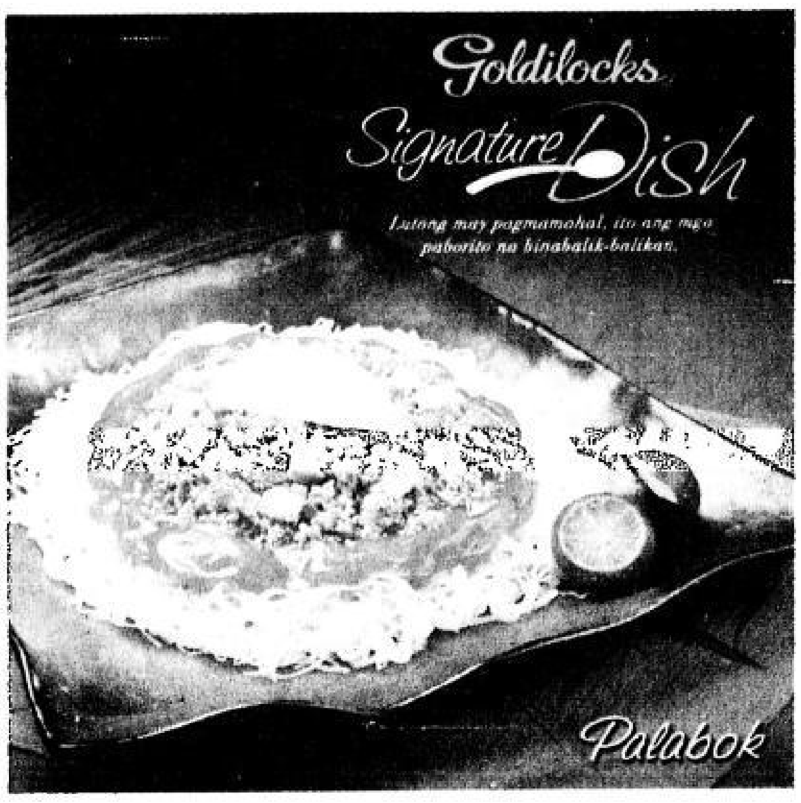
Ruben V. Nepales

LOS ANGELES—"DON'T TELL me he wore that *barong* to the nominations announcement?," Fil-Am actress Tiffany Limos excitedly asked us via e-mail if indeed her friend, director Quentin Tarantino, wore the Philippines' national shirt when he helped announce the nominees to the 65th Golden Globe Awards. Tiffany, who accompanied Quentin on his two-week visit to Manila last August, added: "If he did, then good for him. He loves that *barong*!"

LIMOS and Tarantino all dressed up in traditional Filipino garb in Malacañang.

Even before Quentin surprised us by wearing the *barong* at the Globes, we talked to the actress about Tarantino's favorite new ensemble—the *barong*, track pants and sneakers! The iconoclastic filmmaker was previously seen in this getup at various events.

FIL-AM/13


Goldilocks
Signature Dish
Lutong may pagmamahal, ito ang mga paborito na binabalik-balikan.
Palabok

SMART Buddy
"Ninong, gift ko ha..."
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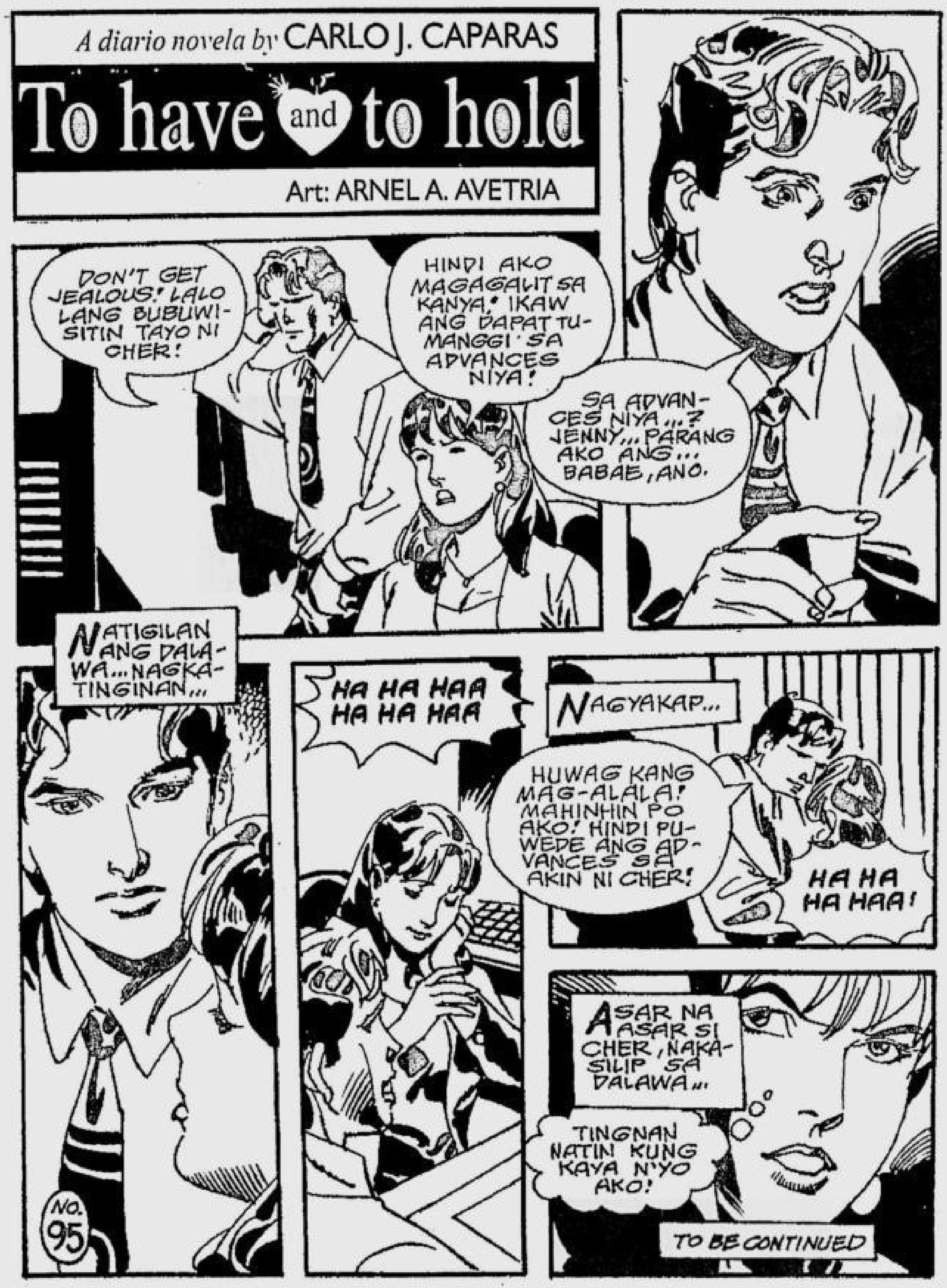
Promo ends Dec. 22, 2007 Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 5904. Series of 2007

SMART
THE POWER TO LEAD

A diario novela by CARLO J. CAPARAS

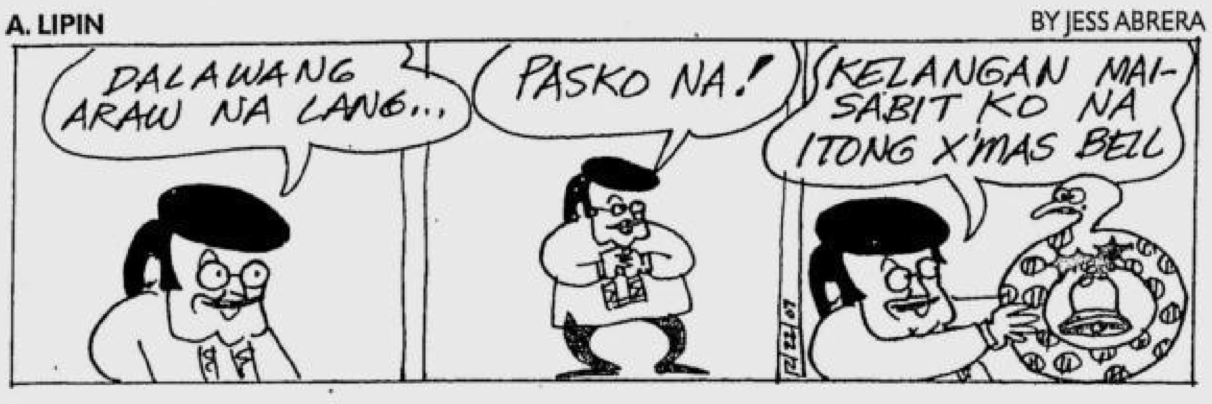
To have and to hold

Art: ARNEL A. AVETRIA


DON'T GET JEALOUS! LALO LANG BUBUWISITIN TAYO NI CHER!
HINDI AKO MAGAGALIT SA KANYA! IKAW ANG DAPAT TUMANGGI SA ADVANCES NIYA!
SA ADVANCES NIYA...? JENNY... PARANG AKO ANG... BABAE, ANO.
NATIGILAN ANG DALAWA... NAGKATINGINAN...
HA HA HAA HA HA HAA
NAGYAKAP...
HUWAG KANG MAG-ALALA! MAHINHIN PO AKO! HINDI PUWEDE ANG ADVANCES SA AKIN NI CHER!
HA HA HA HAA!
ASAR NA ASAR SI CHER, NAKASILIP SA DALAWA...
TINGNAN NATIN KUNG KAYA N'YO AKO!
NO. 95
TO BE CONTINUED

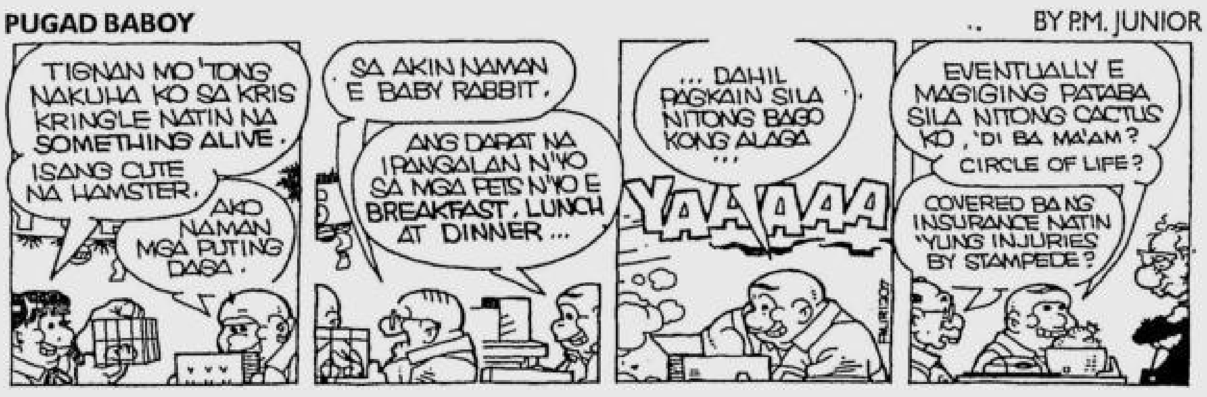
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


DALAWANG ARAW NA LANG...
PASKO NA!
KELANGAN MAISABIT KO NA ITONG X'MAS BELL
12/22/07

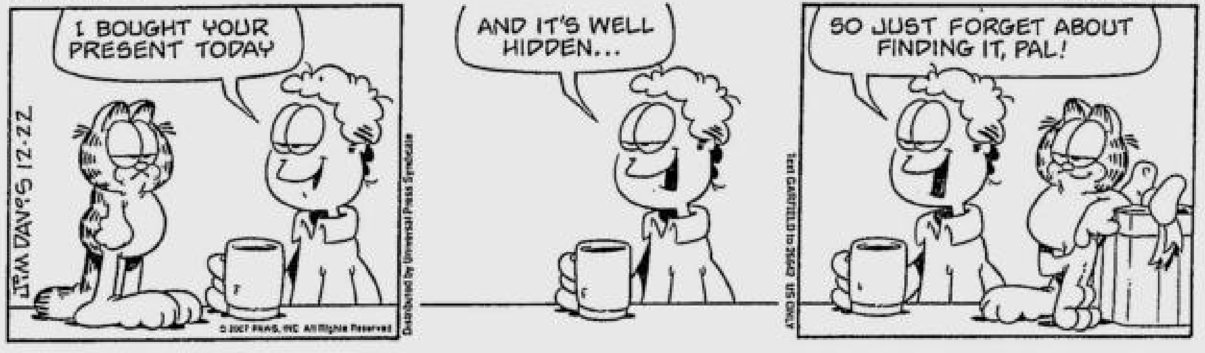
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


TIGNAN MO 'TONG NAKUHA KO SA KRIS KRINGLE NATIN NA SOMETHING ALIVE.
ISANG CUTE NA HAMSTER.
AKO NAMAN MGA PUTING DAGA.
SA AKIN NAMAN E BABY RABBIT.
ANG DAPAT NA IPANGALAN N'YO SA MGA PETS N'YO E BREAKFAST, LUNCH AT DINNER...
... DAHIL PAGKAIN SILA NITONG BAGO KONG ALAGA...
YAAAAAA
EVENTUALLY E MAGIGING PATABA SILA NITONG CACTUS KO, 'DI BA MA'AM? CIRCLE OF LIFE?
COVERED BA NG INSURANCE NATIN 'YUNG INJURIES BY STAMPEDE?

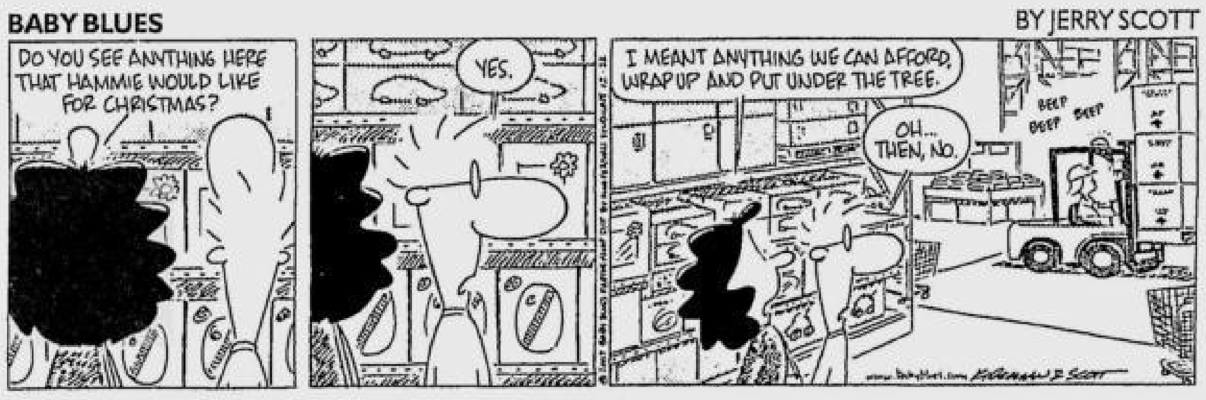
GARFIELD

BY JIM DAVIS


I BOUGHT YOUR PRESENT TODAY
AND IT'S WELL HIDDEN...
SO JUST FORGET ABOUT FINDING IT, PAL!
JIM DAVIS 12-22

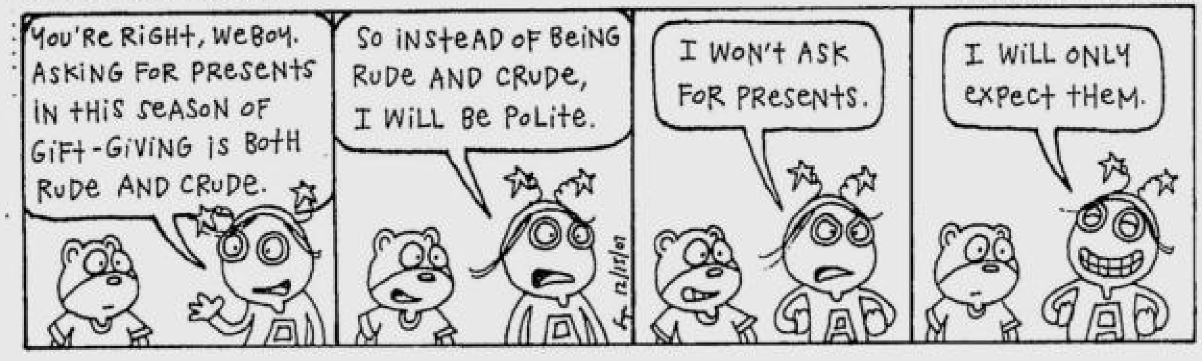
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


DO YOU SEE ANYTHING HERE THAT HAMMIE WOULD LIKE FOR CHRISTMAS?
YES.
I MEANT ANYTHING WE CAN AFFORD, WRAP UP AND PUT UNDER THE TREE.
OH... THEN, NO.
BEEP BEEP BEEP

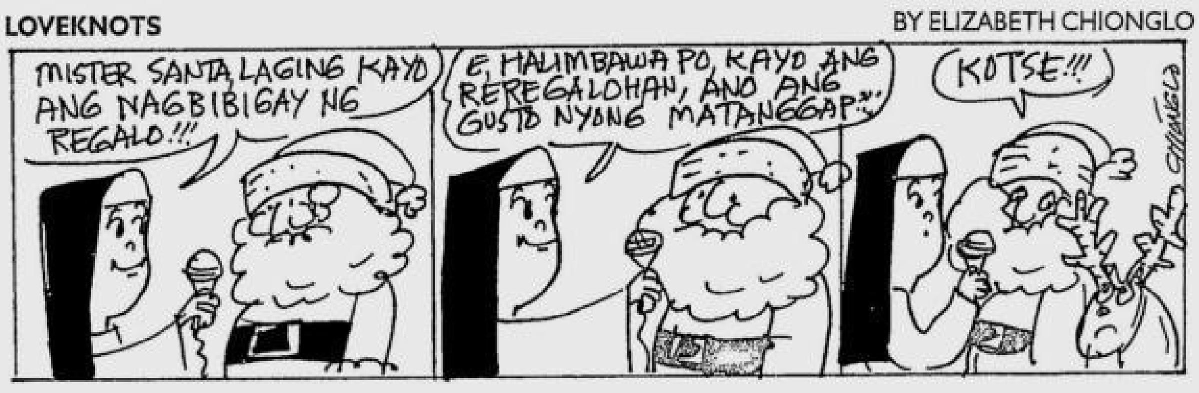
ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


You're Right, WeBoy. Asking For presents in this season of Gift-Giving is Both Rude and Crude.
So instead of Being Rude and Crude, I Will Be Polite.
I Won't Ask For presents.
I Will only expect them.

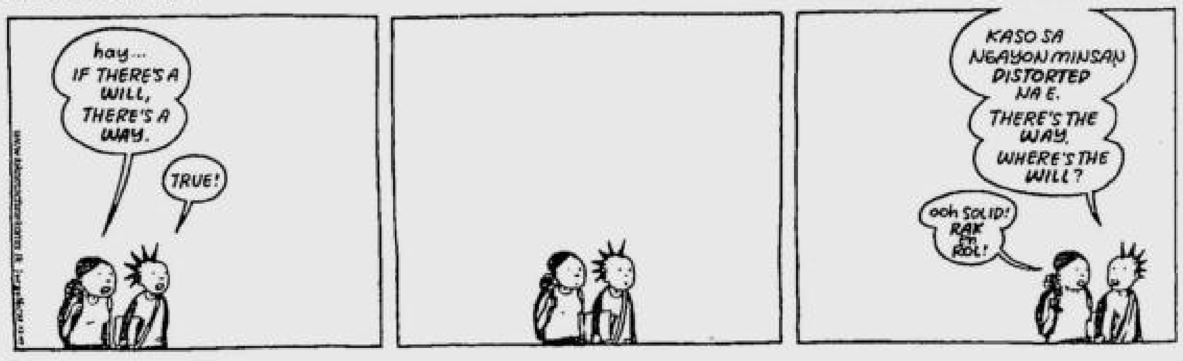
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


MISTER SANTA, LAGING KAYO ANG NAGBIBIGAY NG REGALO!!!
E, HALIMBAWA PO, KAYO ANG REREGALOHAN, ANO ANG GUSTO NYONG MATANGGAP?
KOTSE!!!
CHIONGLO

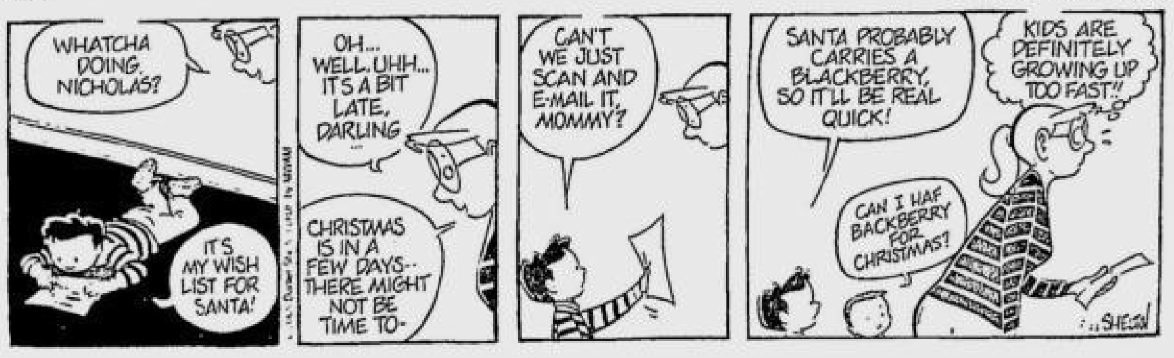
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA

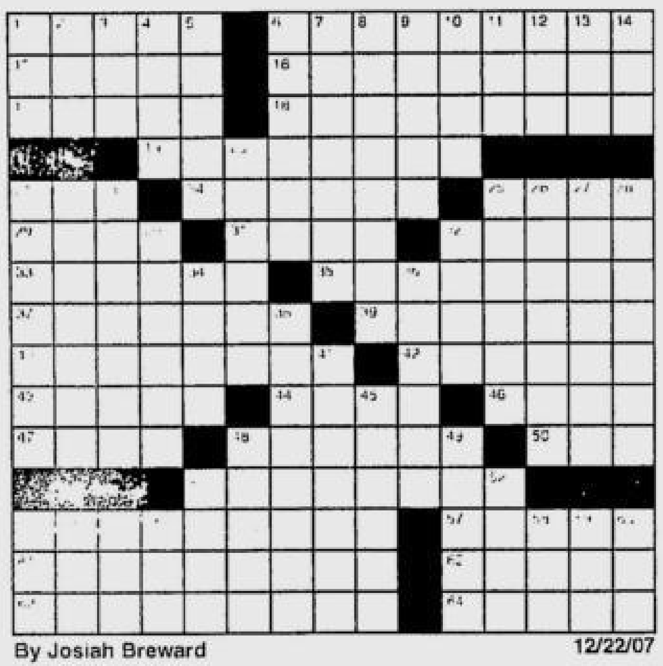

hay... IF THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY.
TRUE!
KASO SA NGAYON MINSAN DISTORTED NA E. THERE'S THE WAY, WHERE'S THE WILL?
ooh SOLID! RAK EN ROL!

BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


WHATCHA DOING, NICHOLAS?
IT'S MY WISH LIST FOR SANTA!
OH... WELL, UHH... IT'S A BIT LATE, DARLING...
CHRISTMAS IS IN A FEW DAYS-- THERE MIGHT NOT BE TIME TO-
CAN'T WE JUST SCAN AND E-MAIL IT, MOMMY?
SANTA PROBABLY CARRIES A BLACKBERRY, SO IT'LL BE REAL QUICK!
KIDS ARE DEFINITELY GROWING UP TOO FAST!!
CAN I HAF BACKBERRY FOR CHRISTMAS?
SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Josiah Breward
Scranton, PA

12/22/07

ACROSS
1 One of the strings
6 Book opener
15 Like temporary committees
16 Anatolia
17 Slugger Garciaparra
18 Greene novel, "_ Quixote"
19 Last round participant
21 Mineo of "Rebel Without a Cause"
24 FDR center
25 Speak
29 Londoner's streetcar
31 Rose or Sampras
32 Dry up
33 Surprise attack
35 Lark
37 Eurasian ruminant
39 Excess
40 Fungi infested
42 Saturates
43 Van Gogh location
44 Defeat
46 Oasis fruit
47 _-do-well
48 Tenant
50 Drunkard
51 Looked at
53 Criticize severely
57 Russian range
61 Estranges
62 City in Scotland or Australia
63 Fatigue
64 Borg or Sorenstam

DOWN
1 Moving vehicle
2 Altar sentence
3 Resistance measure
4 Bread buy
5 Bitter
6 Mexican menu item
7 Quarantine
8 Minuteness
9 Roper's rope
10 Give off
11 Slovenly person
12 __ Arbor, MI
13 Ooze
14 "To __ is human..."
20 Sister's son
21 John Carpenter movie of 1984
22 Ornate wardrobe
23 "On My Own" singer Patti
25 Handed out gratuities
26 Flowering shrubs
27 Began with preliminary remarks
28 Israel's parliament
30 Good wet ground racehorse
32 Viral lump
34 Visualizes
36 Uttered bad words
38 Send into exile
41 Gives
45 On-the-job malady
48 One of Lear's daughters
49 Stays in the military
51 Melon coat
52 Attracted
53 Hep dude
54 Will Smith title role
55 Title of respect
56 Golf gadget
58 Exist
59 Inc. in England
60 That ship

Friday's Puzzle Solved

O	D	E	S	S	A	■	F	R	E	E	■	K	I	A
R	E	T	A	I	L	■	A	E	R	O	■	N	B	C
K	N	E	W	D	E	A	L	E	R	S	■	I	S	R
■	■	■	R	E	S	E	L	L	S	■	A	G	E	E
P	E	K	E	S	■	N	A	E	■	J	O	H	N	S
R	A	N	D	■	R	E	C	R	E	A	N	T	■	■
I	S	O	■	Q	U	A	Y	■	L	I	E	S	T	O
M	E	T	■	U	S	S	■	M	I	L	■	T	R	A
P	L	A	N	E	T	■	R	I	O	S	■	I	O	S
■	■	L	O	U	S	I	E	S	T	■	D	C	V	I
L	A	I	N	F	■	N	A	T	■	H	A	K	E	S
A	N	T	E	■	A	C	C	U	S	E	R	■	■	■
P	I	T	■	K	N	I	T	P	I	C	K	I	N	G
E	S	L	■	I	N	T	O	■	R	H	E	S	U	S
L	E	E	■	D	E	E	R	■	S	E	R	E	N	A

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12/22/07

HOROSCOPE

YOU BORN TODAY: You don't like to be caught off-guard. That's why you always do your homework. If something matters, you're well-prepared. You work carefully to establish your future security. You're patient and thorough. At times you're secretive. You save for a rainy day. Great news: The year ahead might be one of the best, most powerful years of your life! Think big

Birthdate of: Diane Sawyer, journalist; Ralph Fiennes, actor; Barbara Billingsley, actress

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Avoid quarrels with bosses, parents, teachers and authority figures today, including the police. (Don't even go there.) Things could get out of hand very quickly, and you might end up with egg on your face

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Keep clear of political and religious debates today. Don't be pushy with your point of view. In addition, take extra precautions when driving or walking, because this is an accident-prone day.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Disputes about shared property, wills, insurance, inheritances and debt are likely today. This is a poor day to settle matters. Wait until next week

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Be patient with partners and close friends today. People are easily irritable. In fact, somebody might be looking for a fight (certainly not you)

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Try extra hard to be cooperative with co-workers today. Ideas are flying, and people are very quick to argue or disagree with each other. Knowing this, surely you can avoid these squabbles

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Creative ideas are definitely flowing today. Listen to what young people have to offer. Be open to new ways of thinking. However, parents must be patient with children.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): It's a busy day at home or within your family structure today. People are rushing about, and everyone is talking at once. Don't be pushy about your opinions. Cut others some slack.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): This is an accident-prone day, so be careful in all your actions and be careful about what you say. Slow down. Take things easy. Avoid knee-jerk reactions to others.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): You're full of moneymaking ideas today. However, someone might oppose you. That's OK. This simply gives you an opportunity to double-check your big ideas.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Conversations with friends and partners are stimulating and lively today. However, be careful that they don't suddenly erupt into arguments. Tread carefully.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): Be careful of accidents today, especially involving your arms or legs, or involving fire or burns. Guard against rash, impulsive behavior. Slow down!

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): You're all charged up about something today. But others might not agree with you. Try to remember that there are several points of view to most situations. (Ya think?)

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis SudoKu By Dave Green

					4	1	7	
7			2					
8		6				5		
1				7			4	
	6			3				8
		8				7		3
					5			4
	2	5	9					

Difficulty Level ★★★★

12/22

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

4	7	2	6	1	3	9	8	5
3	5	9	2	8	4	7	6	1
8	1	6	9	7	5	2	3	4
1	9	4	8	2	7	6	5	3
5	3	8	4	9	6	1	2	7
6	2	7	5	3	1	4	9	8
2	6	5	1	4	8	3	7	9
9	4	3	7	5	2	8	1	6
7	8	1	3	6	9	5	4	2

Difficulty Level ★★★★

Fil-Am actress confirms Tarantino's love for the *barong*

From page II

We asked Tiffany for her perspective on Quentin's Philippine trip, since she was with him most of the time—including a storm-soaked ride to Malacañang, where he received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Cinemanila Film Festival from President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Tiffany, who was born in Texas to Filipino parents, shares the director's passion for the films of Cirio H. Santiago, Eddie Romero and Gerry de Leon. She has appeared in music videos, commercials, and American films, including the controversial "Ken Park," which was banned in several countries due to its graphic sexual content. Excerpts:

In what way was your recent trip different, because you probably experienced the country from the perspective of a first-time visitor like Quentin?

It was different going with Quentin, because it was more like work and meeting the industry people. The highlights were meeting Joonee Gamboa and Joe Mari Avellana.

TIFFANY with Cirio Santiago.

The first time

Were you surprised at how well-known Quentin was in Manila?

Yes, people came from all over the world to see him. I had friends from Malaysia and Indonesia who went to Manila just to see him. Quentin was mobbed everywhere we went!

I know Quentin has a lot of female fans in the US and Europe, but I honestly didn't expect him to have such a huge fan base in the Philippines. It made me feel more proud that Filipinos have great taste!

What questions did he ask you while you were there?

He asked me about Filipino Time!

What uniquely Filipino traditions or habits did you have to explain to him?

How Filipinos do certain things out of respect—like calling someone *Ate* or *Tito*. And politics.

Did Quentin eat *balut?* Did he have a favorite Filipino food?

No one fed him *balut*. He loves *pancit, adobo,* Tanduay Rum with Coke, San Miguel Beer, and the desserts.

Were your parents and family excited that you went to Malacañang and met President Macapagal-Arroyo?

They didn't believe me until they turned on the TV. They saw that we rode a pedicab to the Palace, because our car got stuck in the floods. We were late, and the President was waiting for us to arrive.

I wore a *terno* and had white orchids in my hair. Quentin was in a *barong*—my mother nearly fell over! She will probably never catch me dressed like that again until I get married. Ha!

Manila visit

Since coming back from the Philippines, what are things regarding his Manila visit that Quentin is still talking about?

He was shocked at how so many of the 35mm prints of Filipino films weren't saved—like Brocka's movie prints.

He has been spotted wearing the *barong* since then, even in Ireland. How many *barongs* does he have?

He has about three or more *barongs*. Cirio Santiago gave him one that is dope (hip)—it's in blue with a nice design. Another one is in auburn. I actually want to steal it and wear it with knee-high boots and a belt. (*laughter*) He has some great *barongs!*

What new insights did you get about the Philippines?

I feel a connection with the people! I helped Apl.de.ap of the Black Eyed Peas raise money for the Love 4 Leyte Foundation to help the mudslide victims. I had to help, since my mother is from there.

Did you watch the movies of new Filipino filmmakers at Cinemanila?

I didn't get a chance to, but I wanted to watch Quark Henares and Ryan Eigenmann's films. I wanted to watch "Tribu" because I heard so many things about it. If the filmmaker of "Tribu" is reading this, please contact me—I want to work with you!

I'm also a fan of Marie Jamora. I showed my parents her short films, and they fell in love with her work, too. I also admire Nora Aunor, Michael De Mesa, Vic Diaz, Ricky Davao and Cesar Montano—there are too many to name!

Script

You were probably not as surprised as I was when I watched "Death Proof" and heard one of the actresses talking about filming in the Philippines.

It would surprise me if Quentin wrote a script and did *not* mention the Philippines at all! He knows a lot about B-movies and that whole genre of filmmaking. It doesn't surprise me that he would write that in his script, because those movies did take place in the Philippines!

Quentin said, "I know a lot about cinema from all over the world, but the Philippines is the only country that had two industries at the time—maybe the only country ever!" Meaning, one part of it made movies solely for export, and another made films that were meant for its people.

Like Tarantino, you appreciated the movies of Santiago, Romero and De Leon at an early age. How young were you when you started watching Filipino films? Was it exciting for you to be in Manila with Quentin and to meet some of the country's most prolific directors in the 1960s and 1970s?

It was a surreal experience for Quentin and me, since we're both cinephiles. I set up a meeting with Quentin and Cirio Santiago on my birthday, Jan. 31, last year. I kept calling Cirio until I got hold of him on the phone.

I left a message on Quentin's voice message. I said, "Quentin, you're not going to believe who's here in Los Angeles..." I said it in a little kid's voice. Quentin called back and he was freaking out, too. We were in hysterics! On the way to Nate 'n Al's in Beverly Hills, I was shaking, because I was so excited to be meeting Cirio for the first time! I got there early—I was shocked to be sitting in front of him!

Thrilling

You can't imagine how thrilling that was for us! Quentin had never been to the Philippines before, and he always dreamed about going there. I had the idea to set up Quentin and stalk Cirio and Eddie Romero when I was in Austin, Texas in the summer of 2006. Quentin invited me to Austin for his "Best of Quentin Tarantino Film Festival." He was showing the films that have been hits over the last few years, and Cirio's "The Muthers" was one of them.

Quentin got up, introduced the movie, and all of a sudden, he started giving a whole speech about the Philippines. He talks about Romero and Santiago in detail. He talked about the country like he'd been there! When the movie was over, I asked Quentin if he has ever been to the Philippines before, and he said no. That's when I decided to make it happen!

Wrong era

Quentin told me that I was born in the wrong era. He said I would have been queen of the '60s and '70s if I was at my prime during that era. I grew up watching all of those exploitation movies. I said to Quentin that it was a sad thing that the B-movie generation was gone, but he told me that independent filmmaking is the modern-day, B-movie generation.

E-mail rvnepales_5585@yahoo.com, and read his blog, "The Nepales Report," on www.inquirerbloggers.net/nepalesreport.

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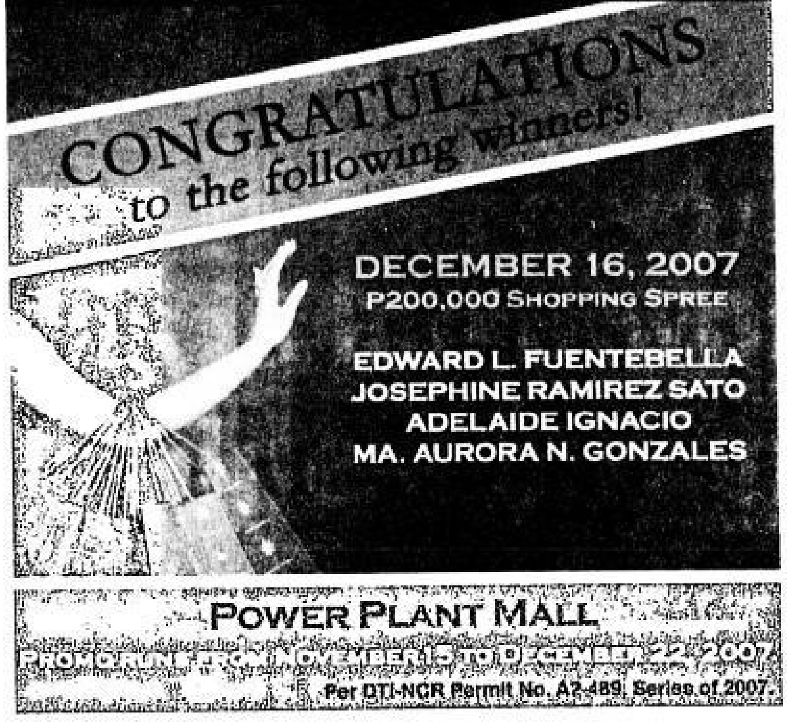
DOLBY DIGITAL

ELIZABETH: GOLDEN AGE PG13 1:00,3:30,6:00,8:30	MARTIAN CHILD G 12:50,3:10,5:30, 7:50,10:10	THE GOLDEN COMPASS PG13 12:10,2:40,5:10, 7:40,10:10
THE KINGDOM R13 12:10,2:40,5:10, 7:40,10:10	DEATH PROOF R13 1:30,3:40,5:50,8:00	ELIZABETH THE GOLDEN AGE PG13 12:30,3:00,5:30, 8:00,10:30

MOVIES & SCHEDULES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE



CONGRATULATIONS to the following winners!

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JOSEPHINE RAMIREZ SATO
ADELAIDE IGNACIO
MA. AURORA N. GONZALES

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Shangri-La Plaza (Mandaluyong)
Tel. 633.2227/633.7851 loc. 171
1 ENCHANTED
2 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
3 KINGDOM
4 FREAD CLAUS / HAIRSPRAY
PREMIERE
5 ELIZABETH

Blue Wave
Blue Wave (M) Tel. 934.1927
1 ENCHANTED
2 BATANES
3 THE GOLDENT COMPASS
4 RESERVED

CINEWORLD
1 [illegible]
2 [illegible]
3 RESERVED
4 GREEN PARADISE
5 HOOD OF HORROR

starmall Tel. 726.6150
1 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
2 MARTIAN CHILD

Mandaluyong
tel 533.3851 533.3856
1 HITMAN
2 PLEASE CALL
3
4 RESERVED

Cinemagic Pacific Mall
(Lucena) Tel. 250.8263
1 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
2 BATANES

Fiesta World Mall
(Lipa) Tel. (043) 981.0790
1 RENDITION
2 BALLS OF FURY
3 BATANES
4 BEOWULF

Center Mall Cinema
(Baguio) Tel. (074) 444.3946
1 HITMAN
2 THE GOLDENT COMPASS

Centre Plaza Cinema
(Bataan) Tel. (047) 237.7007
1 ENCHANTED
2 THE GOLDENT COMPASS

EASTWOOD CINEMAS
Eastwood City (Libis)
Tel. 687.6963/ 687.6972
1 ENCHANTED
2 THE GOLDENT COMPASS
3 ELIZABETH: THE GOLDEN AGE
4 THE KINGDOM

FESTIVAL CINEMA
Festival Supermall (Muntinlupa)
Tel. 850.3571/ 850.3572
1 FRED CLAUS / BEOWULF
2 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
3 DEATH PROOF / CATACOMBS
4 ENCHANTED
5 MARTIAN CHILD
6 ELIZABETH: THE GOLDEN AGE
7 THE KINGDOM
8 RESERVED
9 ONE MORE CHANCE
10 PASUKOB / BATANES

OPENS SOON!!!
CASH AND CARRY CINEMAS
Cor. Buendia and South Super highway, Makati City
Tel. (to be announced)
1
2

Jade Cinema
(Angeles) Tel. (045) 887.5001
1 RENDITION
2 THE GOLDENT COMPASS
3 HOOD OF HORROR
4 BOOGEY MAN - 2

Llanas Cinema
(Alabang) Tel. 850.1276
1 DEATH PROOF
2 GRASYA
3 GREEN PARADISE
4 BALLS OF FURY

Llanas Movie City
(Calamba) Tel. (049) 545.7202
1 BALLS OF FURY
2 KIKAY
3 BATANES
4 WILD ORCHID
5 GAME PLAN

Cinema 2000 Movie Theaters of the New Millenium

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Makati) Tel. 816.4214/ 16
1 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
2 ELIZABETH: THE GOLDEN AGE
3 THE KINGDOM
4 DEATH PROOF

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Calamba) Tel. (049) 547.7383
1 THE GOLDENT COMPASS
2 GAME PLAN
3 THE KINGDOM

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Plaridel) Tel. (044) 795.3320
1 THE GOLDEN COMPASS
2 FREAD CLAUS HITMAN
3 THE KINGDOM

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Gapan) Tel. (044) 486.7736
1 THE GOLDENT COMPASS
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12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00

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HITMAN 6:35 8:20 10:00

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12:40 2:55 5:10 7:25 9:40

7 GAME PLAN
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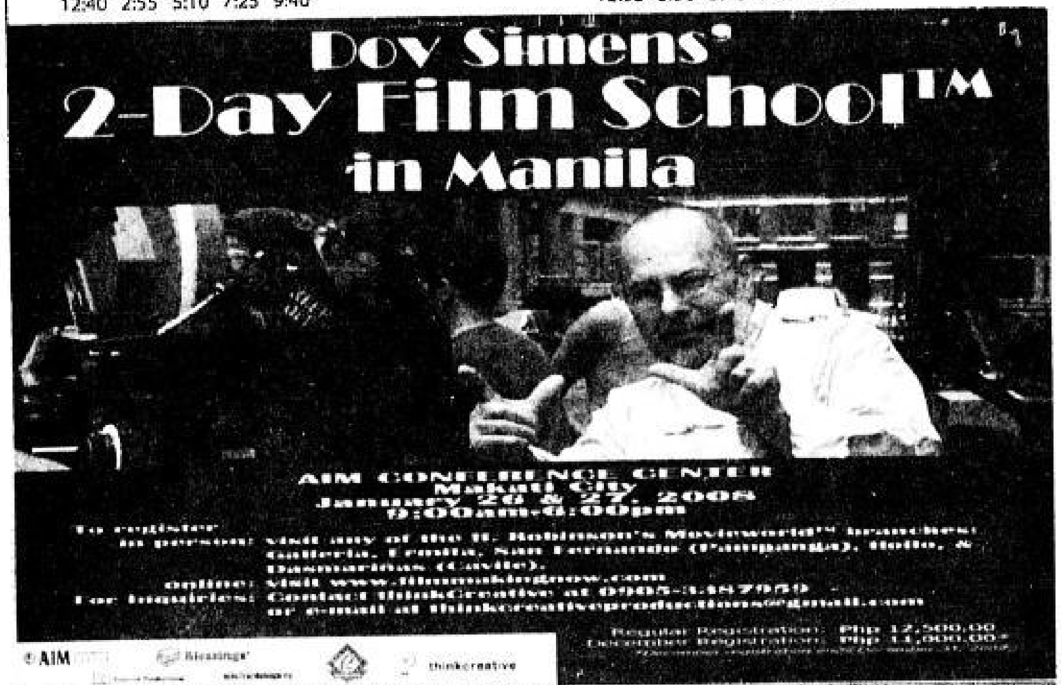
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1:00 3:00 5:00 7:00 9:00

5 BEOWULF
1:00 3:35 6:10 9:00

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'Katas ng Saudi' entertains and enlightens

By Remy M. Umerez

ONE 2007 MMFF ENTRY THAT ENtertains and enlightens is Maverick Films' "Katas ng Saudi." It drew favorable reactions when it was previewed by the press at the Podium, and was graded A by the Cinema Evaluation Board.

Sen. Jinggoy Estrada plays the movie's protagonist, Oca Dimaano, an overseas Filipino worker who comes home from Saudi Arabia to a messy family life. Portraying his wife is Lorna Tolentino, with Shaina Magdayao, Aaron Villaflor and Julian Estrada as their children—they have issues with their *balikbayan* father.

Trying times

Trust writer-director Joey Reyes to find humor in the *Pinoy* family's household during its most trying times. He calls the characters played by Jinggoy and Lorna the 21st century's Mr. and Mrs. Juan dela Cruz—many Filipino families will identify with them, because a great number of *Pinoys* work abroad to seek a better future for their families.

"Katas ng Saudi" is a dream come true for Jinggoy—but it almost didn't push through! "My mistake was, I did not inform my dad (former President Joseph Estrada) that I was producing a movie. The production was already on its fifth shooting day when he learned about it, and he told me to abandon the project and concentrate on politics, instead!," Jinggoy narrates.

"I explained to him that the film is cause-oriented—it deals with the plight of overseas workers. I reminded him of the movie he did about the US military bases and how he had fought against them. It was only then that he gave me his blessing to resume filming," he discloses.

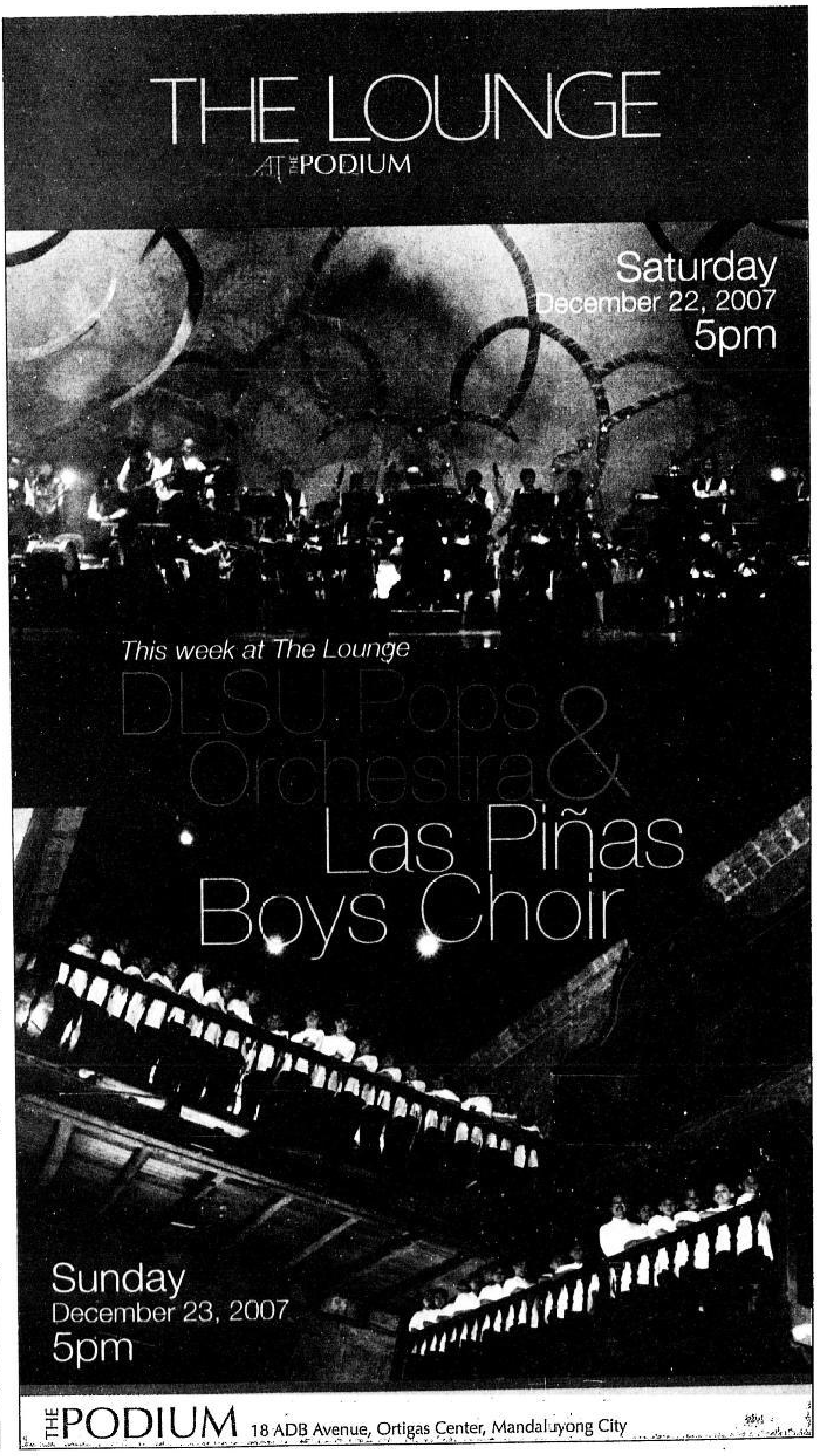
After the screening, a triumphant Jinggoy beams, "I'm glad people appreciate the movie! *Nakakataba ng puso!*"

Mannerisms

Though there are still shades of his father's mannerisms in Jinggoy's portrayal, the director manages to tone them down and helps Jinggoy put more heart into his character. "*Siga pa rin ang kanyang dating*, but he's considerably less prone to violence. In fact, in some scenes, if it was Erap who played Oca, *baka may umbagang naganap!* Jinggoy's Oca is more patient and understanding," Joey further points out.

MOST ADMIRED TV PERSONALITIES

The annual Anak TV Awards were held recently, with 94 television programs being honored for their child-sensitivity and family-friendliness and 20 male and female TV personalities emerging as the people's choices for being the most admired and wholesome.
In photo are (from left) Anak TV spokesperson Mikee Cojuangco-Jaworski, with People's Choice winners Angel Locsin, Karen Davila, Julius Babao, Tintin Bersola-Babao, Mike Enriquez, Bernadette Sembrano, award presenters MTRCB chair Marissa Laguardia and Anak TV trustee Elvira Go. Not in photo are other winners: Korina Sanchez, Arnold Clavio, Sam Milby, Sharon Cuneta, Gary Valenciano, Mel Tiangco, Piolo Pascual, Sarah Geronimo, Ted Failon, John Lloyd Cruz, Aga Muhlach, Jessica Soho, Edu Manzano and Toni Gonzaga.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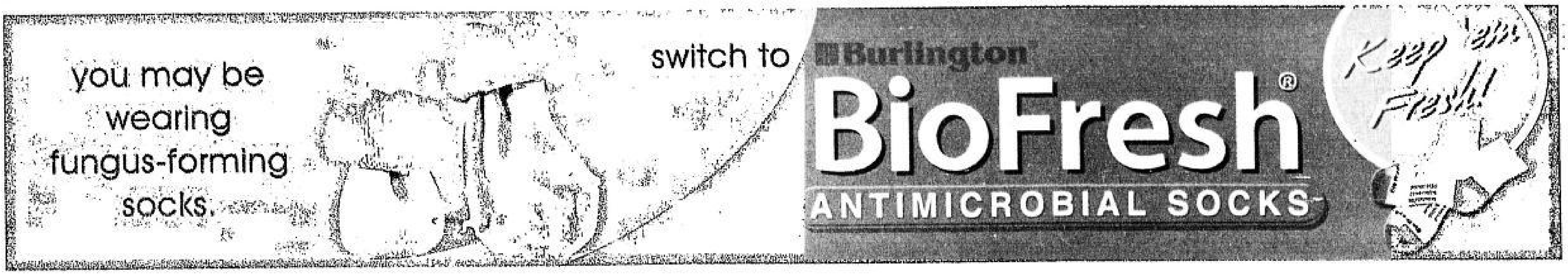

Golden Globes set new faces on the road to stardom

LOS ANGELES—SOME STARS are born, others toil for years before landing a dream role. Occasionally, the road to Hollywood's red carpet starts at a New York ice cream shop. Nikki Blonsky, the teenager plucked from an ice cream parlor to star in the musical, "Hairspray," was one the new faces nominated for a Golden Globe award, which could propel them to Hollywood's A-list.

MCAVOY (left) with Keira Knightley in "Atonement."

Blonsky, 19, picked up a nomination for Best Actress in a Musical or Comedy for her acting debut as a plump girl who wants to dance on a 1960s TV show. At 16, she auditioned for the part on Broadway, but she was turned down because she was too young. "A year ago, she was in high school. She'd never done anything in her life, and now, to be a Golden Globe nominee—it's so thrilling!," exclaimed Craig Zadan, one of "Hairspray's" producers.

BLONSKY. "Born" to play her comic ingenue role in "Hairspray."

COTILLARD. Portrays iconic singer Edith Piaf in "La Vie en Rose."

PAGE. Nominated for playing a pregnant teen in "Juno."

Citation

Blonsky's costar, John Travolta, who got a Best Supporting Actor citation, said she was born for the part. "Once in every decade, there's a person who has a passion for a special role."

Blonsky was joined by Ellen Page, 20, also nominated for Best Actress in a Musical or Comedy for playing an insouciant, pregnant teen in the coming-of-age movie, "Juno." Page has said she tries to steer clear of stereotypical roles for teenage girls and has already won two breakthrough awards in the United States for her role in "Juno."

James McAvoy, 29, could become a household name in the United States after picking up his first major Best Actor nomination as the romantic lead in "Atonement," the epic 1940s drama that led the Golden Globe's list of nominees.

The Scottish actor won praise last year for playing a naive British doctor in "The Last King of Scotland." He is a regular face on British TV, but he remains little known in the United States. "It came as a surprise, really, and I find it quite funny, because I've never really considered myself that type of actor," McAvoy told Reuters.

Chance

Marion Cotillard, 32, is also a newcomer to Hollywood despite 14 years in the French movie industry before landing her dream role as singer Edith Piaf in "La Vie en Rose."

"When you do a French movie, you don't know if it's going to cross cultures," Cotillard mused. "What I like right now is that, I have the chance to meet interesting directors, amazing actors and producers. The fact that I would be well-known is less important than all the people you meet," she added. Cotillard was nominated for Best Actress in a Musical.

Since the Golden Globe nominations are often a reliable guide to Oscar nominations in January, Ryan Gosling—a newcomer last year for playing a drug addict in "Half Nelson"—had some timely advice for the Golden Globe freshmen: "If there is ever a time to pick up the phone, it's now!" *Reuters*

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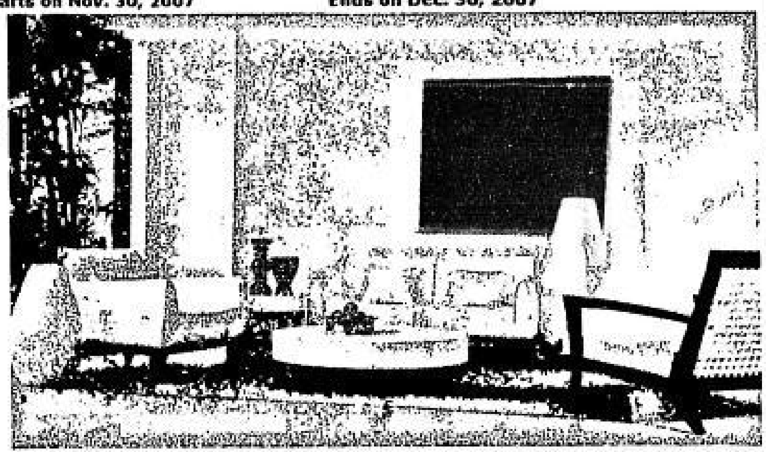

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The movie, not the book

By Nestor U. Torre

WHEN "THE GOLDEN COMPASS" WAS about to be released, the visually spectacular film was opposed by Christian groups that decried the "attack on God and religion" mounted by the books by Philip Pullman on which the movie was based. They felt that the books were bad enough, but the film could undermine viewers' faith more because the cinema is thought to be a more visually seductive and persuasive medium than literature.

Thus, when "The Golden Compass" started its run, it was scorned by some. Ironically, however, the attendant controversy had made others so curious about the movie that they went out of their way to watch it! Well, that's how the show biz cookie crumbles.

Findings

We recently caught "The Golden Compass" to see if it was a good movie—and, more tangentially, to find out what all the attendant fuss and bother was about. These are our findings:

First, our notes on the film as film: Its visuals are truly grand and quite edgily sophisticated. But, despite the fact that its protagonist, Lyra, is an adolescent, the movie is quite dark, cold and sad, so it isn't really a film for young viewers.

Having said that, we must still point out that the movie's scenes showing Lyra (Dakota Blue Richards) with her massive polar bear ally are truly lovely and touching to behold. And the stellar cast's performances (Richards, Nicole Kidman, Daniel Craig, etc.) are wonderfully textured and ascendant. They may not mitigate the movie's cold, cold heart, but they provide sterling and bracing examples of the thespic art.

KIDMAN AND RICHARDS. Topbill controversial sci-fi flick, "The Golden Compass."

Elements

As for the movie's "corrosive" elements, we must report that this first film (of a possible trilogy) bears only vague traces of the original books' antireligion bent. The movie's producers must have decided to defer its more controversial themes for the planned cinematic trilogy's succeeding films.

In this first film, all we get is a passionate

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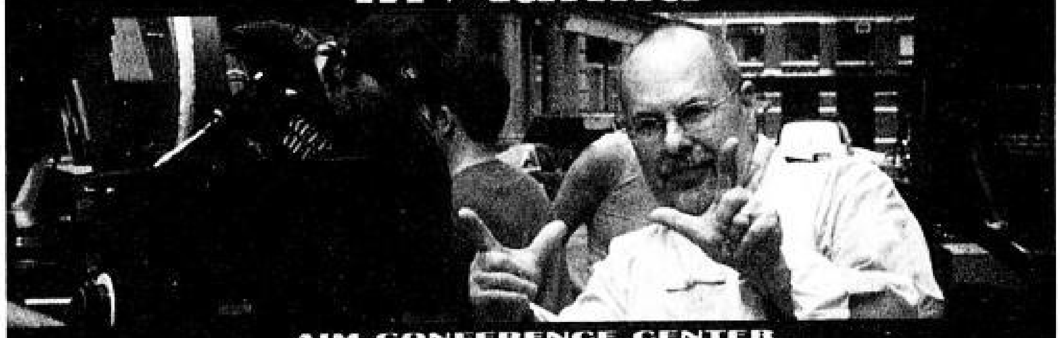

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BATANES 4:50 | 9:30 CATACOMB 2:30 | 7:10	ONE MORE CHANCE 12:45 | 3:40 6:35 | 9:30	THE KINGDOM 12:10 | 4:50 | 9:30	PASUKOB 3:00 | 7:20 BEOWULF 2:25 | 7:05	ENCHANTED 1:45 | 4:20 6:55 | 9:30

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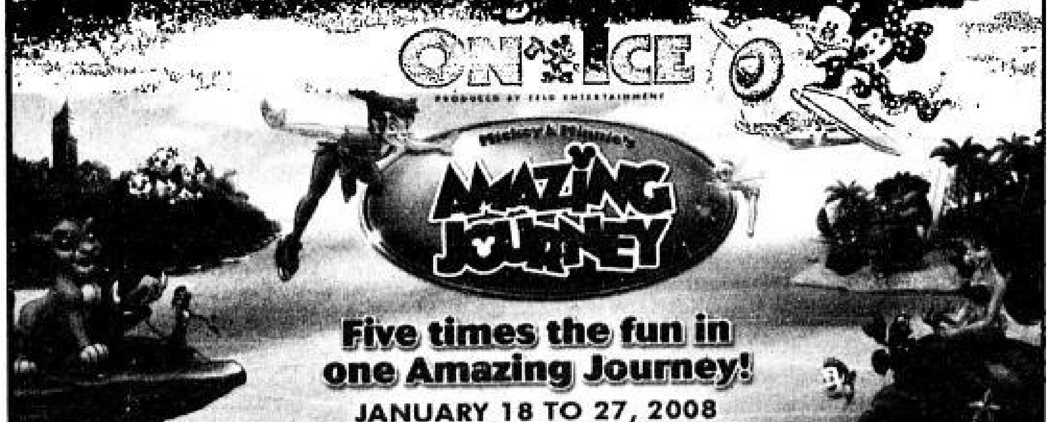

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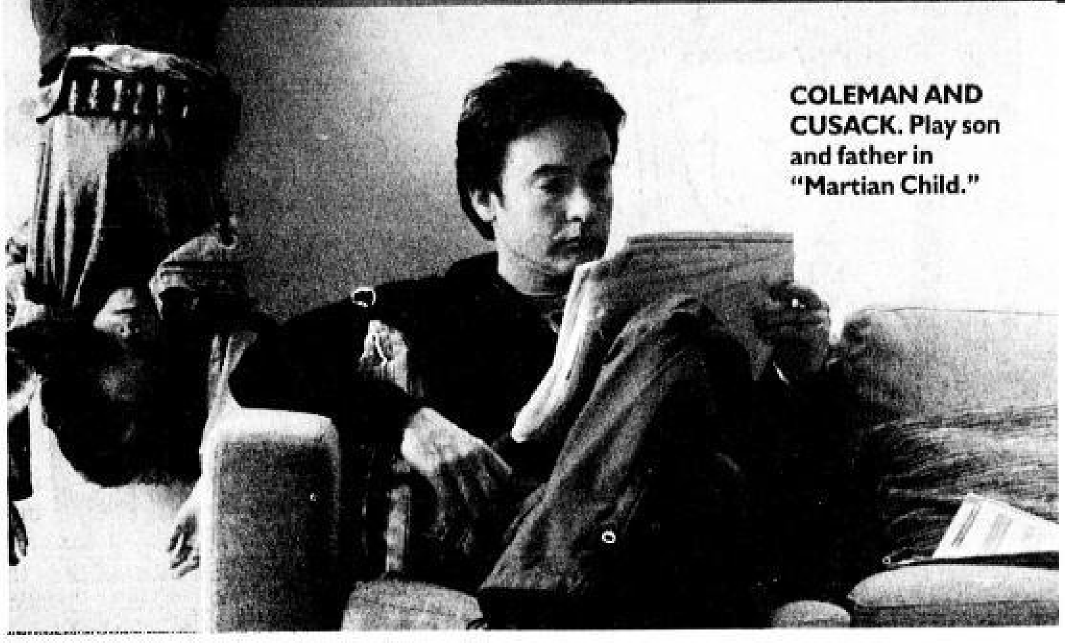
John Cusack learns about parenthood in heartwarming drama



COLEMAN AND CUSACK. Play son and father in "Martian Child."

By Rito P. Asilo

"Martian Child"

D: Menno Meyjes
S: John Cusack, Bobby Coleman, Amanda Peet and Anjelica Huston

DIRECTOR MENNO MEYJES PUTS JOHN Cusack's Mr. Nice Guy celluloid persona to good use in the three-hanky domestic drama, "Martian Child," in which the 41-year-old actor plays David Gordon, a widowed science-fiction novelist who copes with his debilitating grief by adopting Dennis (Bobby Coleman), a 6-year-old orphan who claims to have come from Mars.

To keep himself from floating away into outer space, the self-proclaimed Martian boy wears a gravity belt around his waist—as he walks around inside a cardboard box! If David thinks the psychologically battered child is the diversion he needs to get on with his life, then he's got his work cut out for him—especially when reality starts to creep into his daily routine:

As David struggles to meet the deadline for his next book, he's distracted by Dennis' inability to interact with other people, and his penchant for stealing, which eventually leads to the boy's expulsion from school—and he's only in second grade! When David confronts Dennis about his inability to fit in, the boy asks: "Is it good to be like everyone else?"

David further learns about life—and parenthood—when he realizes he's on the verge of losing his adopted son. Indeed, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. As the social-welfare official reminds him: "Sometimes, you're so eager to be the child's friend that you forget to be his parent."

Cusack nails the film's dramatic moments with quiet integrity and aplomb—and with a lot of help from the angelic Coleman. The fact that he doesn't resort to lachrymose caterwauling makes the movie's sensitive sequences throb with emotional pertinence.

Adding to the movie's fuzzy, Christmasy feel are the winsome performances of Amanda Peet (playing David's friend and romantic interest), Joan Cusack (as the protagonist's thoughtful sister with the funny one-liners) and Anjelica Huston, who hams it up as David's stern publisher.

Structurally, the film's narrative unfolds in predictable fashion, but it's hard to deny how well the production dispenses its timely, timeless moral about caring for the people who matter most in our lives—and those we rely on in our moments of need.

"Martian Child" wears its heart on its sleeve—and its moments of warmth and good intention will linger in viewers' minds for some time.

In one memorable scene, for example, David realizes how he's truly found family when his dog dies. As he silently weeps over his loss, his adopted son touches his arm—and weeps with him! Perfect for the Christmas season, right?

BOBBY Coleman portrays an orphan who claims to have come from another planet.

The movie, not the book

From page J2

espousal of the importance of man's exercising his "free will." As for the story's villains, the representatives of the malevolent Magisterium are made to look archly scheming and bilious, but overt moral or psychological violence is hardly to be seen or had.

So, in evaluating the essence and intent of "The Golden Compass," we should remind ourselves that we're viewing the film, not the book(s). This production has clearly opted to be less contentious than its literary source, possibly postponing its thematic battles to subsequent installments. So, its opponents must bide their time until the contrary evidence finally hits the big screen, for them to more productively fight over.

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AT THE CINEMAS

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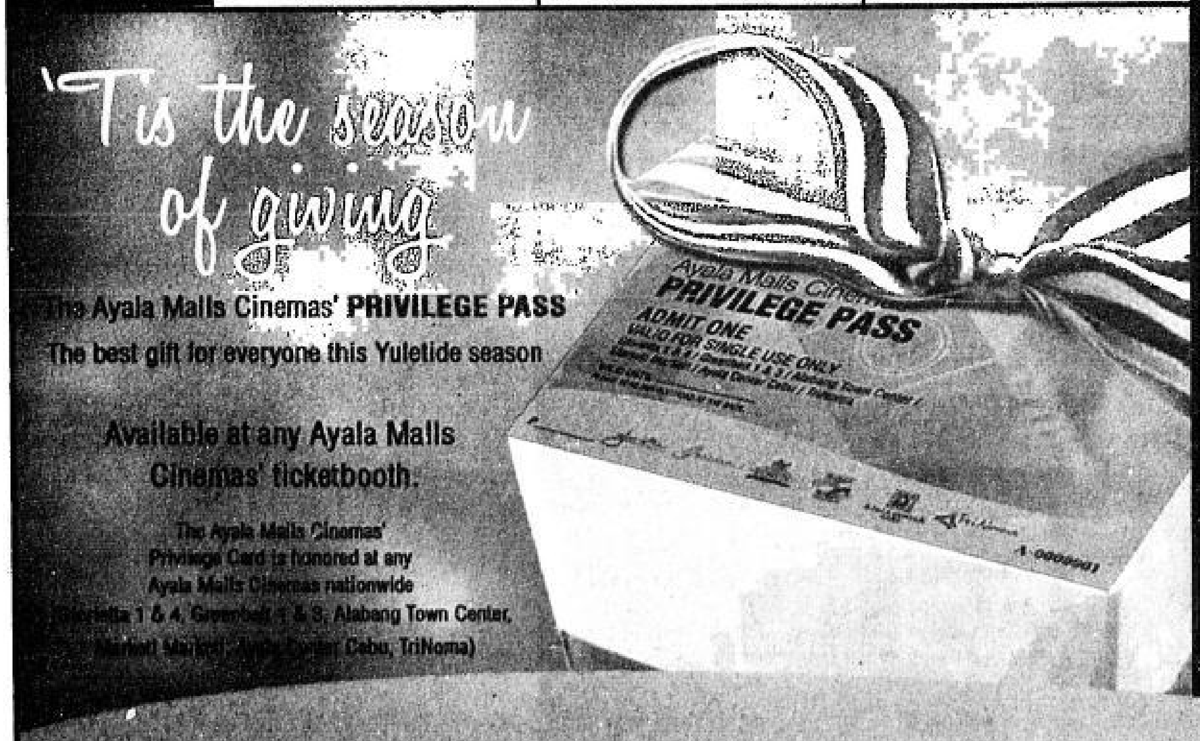

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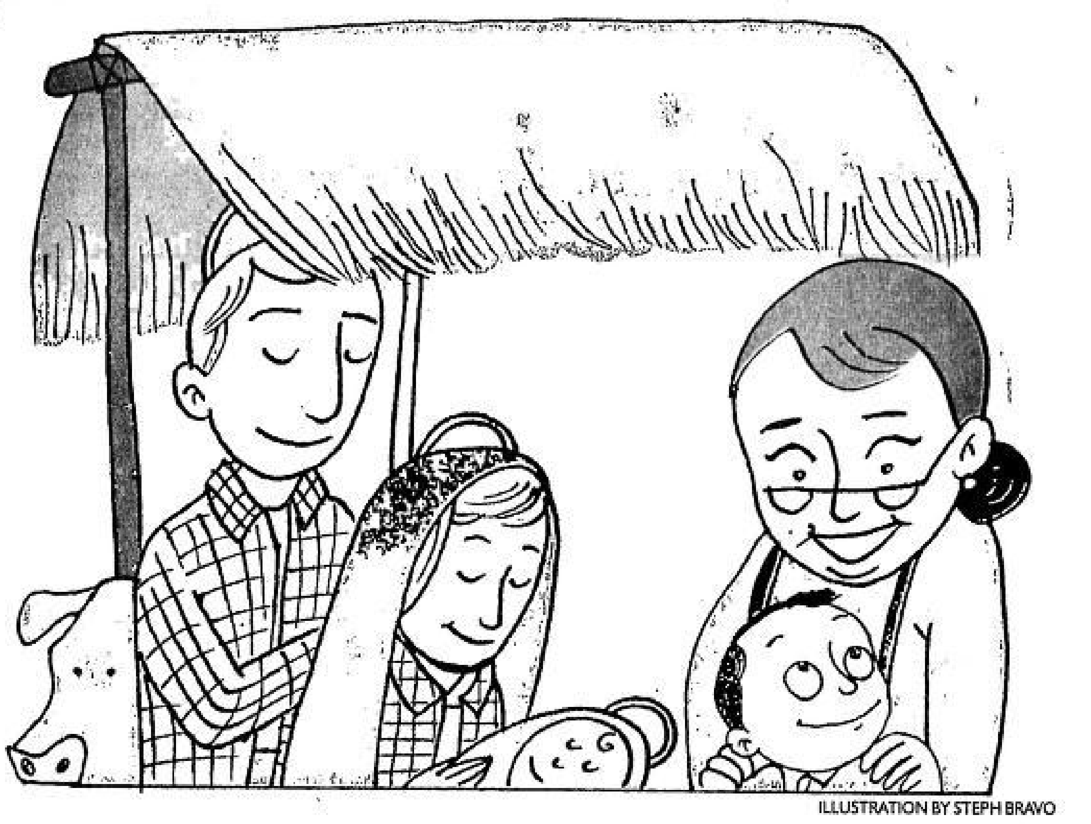
YULETIDE STORY FOR YOUNG READERS

The best Christmas gift of all



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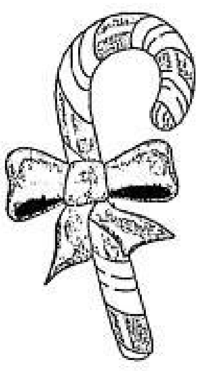

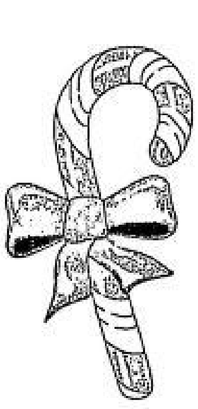

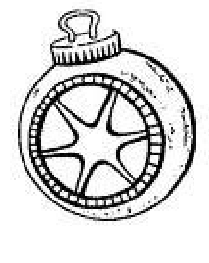

MITOY'S FATHER and mother were both working in Italy, so he was being cared for by his *Lola* Leoning. She tried to make him feel loved, but it just wasn't the same without his parents.

Still, Mitoy did his best to understand why they had to leave him in the care of his grandmother. It wasn't that they were abandoning him, they assured him in their infrequent letters to him.

"We are working hard to make a lot of money now, so you can study in a good school and have everything you want," they explained. It sounded good, but Mitoy felt a little guilty because he was still unhappy.

Memories

His grandmother did her best to take care of all of his needs, talk to him, help him with his homework, pray with him at night and soothe his fears and worries, but Mitoy still longed for the embrace of his parents. But, they had been gone a long time, so even his memories of them were starting to fade away.

This really bothered Mitoy, because he fretted that the day would come when he would wake up and realize that he didn't remember his parents' faces at all!

He shyly shared this fear with his *Lola*. Seeing how worried he was, she took him in her arms and told him that this would *never* happen. In fact, his parents had told her that they planned to come home—soon!

When? Mitoy wanted to know. *When—exactly?* Didn't they make the same promise last year—and the year before? But, nothing had happened!

In fact, even their letters and remittances had become irregular—and, for some months now, had completely stopped.

What had happened to them? How would he and his *Lola* manage without the money that his parents used to send in the past?

More desperate

Mitoy's thoughts grew even darker and more desperate as the Christmas season approached. It was supposed to be a happy time for families, but his own home felt lonely.

There wasn't even enough food on the table on ordinary days, let alone all of the yummy dishes and trimmings needed for a proper Christmas feast! This would be a sad Christmas, indeed, for Mitoy and his grandmother!

Unknown to the other, each was thinking of ways to make it a happier time, despite their money problems. Since he went to school only in the morning, Mitoy shined shoes outside the town's mall in the afternoon.

For her part, *Lola* Leoning baked *buko* pies and *cassava* cakes, which she sold from door to door, and at her friend Meding's store.

Every week, Mitoy and his *Lola* would lock themselves up in their respective rooms to count their extra earnings. Mitoy's savings for one week came up to P135—and he was ecstatic! Only a few more weeks to go, and he would be able to buy his *Lola* the Christmas gift she wanted most!

She didn't exactly tell him what it was, but one time, when they went window-shopping at the mall, he saw her eyes light up in a special way when she fondled a beautiful, pearl-beaded rosary in a religious store. It wasn't made of real pearls, but it was truly lovely, and Mitoy understood why his grandmother loved it so much!

Pairs of shoes

But, his heart sank when he saw the price—P480. It would take more weeks of hard work shining hundreds of pairs of shoes before he could earn that much!

Still, the prospect of seeing his *Lola* break into a happy smile when she opened her gift on Christmas Eve was reason enough for Mitoy to keep trying to reach his goal!

Little did he know, but *Lola* Leoning was also "plotting" to get him the Christmas gift of his dreams: A pair of really sleek-looking sports shoes! Often, she heard him talking about his basketball games with his classmates, and how embarrassed he was to be wearing only ordinary school shoes while Montet, the rich kid whose father owned a gasoline station, was cockily running and jumping around in his imported basketball shoes, which helped him win game after game for his team!

Lola Leoning knew that Mitoy would shoot up like a rocket with joy when he opened *his* Christmas gift and saw the special basketball shoes she would buy for him gleaming in their box! But, they cost more than P2,000—so, enough of wishing and dreaming, it was time to bake those pies and cakes, one after another!

One night, *Lola* Leoning smiled quietly to herself when she saw that she had already saved almost P2,000. Only a few more days, and she would already be able to get her grandson the Christmas gift he wanted most!

Sadly, two weeks before Christmas, it rained really hard—and the roof of their little home started to leak badly. *Lola* Leoning scolded herself for not having it fixed sooner, when it wasn't raining.

No choice

But, she had no choice except to have the roof repaired right after the rains stopped—and the unexpected expense depleted her "budget" for Mitoy's gift quite severely.

As for Mitoy, he was experiencing his own share of problems: His only pair of shoes had split their soles after a particularly hectic game, so he had to have it fixed. He didn't want to burden his *Lola* with the extra expense, so he paid for the repair himself.

Another time, his crush, Angeli, pleaded with him to buy raffle tickets to boost her candidacy for Little Miss Charming at school, and she fluttered her eyelashes so prettily at him—how could he refuse?

Finally, there was the field trip to the kids' Science Fair that also had to be paid for—and Mitoy realized with a sinking feeling that his fund for *Lola's* gift had been pretty much wiped out!

Neither of them knew about each other's problems, so they worried separately, not knowing what to do. There were only a few days to go before Christmas, and the supposedly happy season looked particularly bleak!

Troubled thoughts

To sort out her troubled thoughts, *Lola* Leoning decided to go to church the following afternoon. As she prayed in front of the altar, her eyes kept going to the little *belen* near the side of the chapel.

It was made of simple *sawali* and bamboo, and sheltered a Holy Family dressed to look like a Filipino farming couple and their little newborn baby. Around them weren't sheep or camel, but carabaos, goats—even some chickens.

The Filipino *belen's* message was clear: This was a poor family's Christmas, but a quietly happy one—because a child had been born. Without realizing it, *Lola* Leoning started weeping quietly. Going home after her visit to the church, she felt much better.

When she got home, *Lola* Leoning found Mitoy looking for her and wondering where she had gone. She told him, and left it at that.

Early the next morning, on Dec. 24, *Lola* Leoning dressed up and walked to the front door. She was surprised to see Mitoy waiting for her there, already dressed up.

"I want to go with you to the church," he told her.

"But, it's cold outside," she hesitated.

"I'm wearing my jacket and cap," Mitoy pointed out. "Besides, it's Christmas Eve—we're supposed to go to church."

"But, you're too young to be up this early—you need your sleep."

"Please, *Lola*—I want to go!"

Peace and consolation

Since there was no stopping her grandson, *Lola* Leoning took him to church. And, once again, she felt a special feeling of peace and consolation as she looked at the simple *belen* of poor people who were happy despite their problems, despite their poverty. It was a beautiful sight.

Mitoy, too, was struck by the festive Christmas mass and the *belen*, but in a different way: He focused on the Christ child lying in the manger, and felt close to the *Niño*, because he too was still only a child—and he also had very little—in fact, practically nothing except his little home, his few friends, his parents who weren't there—and his *Lola*, who was.

All of a sudden, his heart leapt with joy, gratitude and love for his grandmother. He realized that he had spent too much time brooding over his parents' absence, getting angry with them about it, feeling miserably sorry for himself—but, he had forgotten that, in the midst of all of this misery, his *Lola* had been there *for him*, quietly trying to make things better, caring *for him* to ease the hurt he felt because his parents weren't there to see him through the fears and pains of growing up. The point was, his Lola *was*. She was truly a *grand* parent!

As the last carol filled the church at the end of the Christmas mass, Mitoy embraced his *Lola* tightly. She looked down at him, surprised, and saw that he was crying. His little chest heaved, tears streamed down his cheeks, and he was mouthing words that she couldn't understand.

"Mitoy? What's the matter?"

Voice

"*Lola*," Mitoy finally found his voice, "I wanted to give you—a rosary—for Christmas—but, I didn't make—enough money!"

"Oh, Mitoy," *Lola* Leoning smiled guiltily, "I, too, wanted to get you your favorite basketball shoes—but I also failed. I'm sorry!"

"Lola—it's OK—because, you're here—you're here for me, *Lola*!" Thank you!"

"Thank you, too, Mitoy. There may only be two of us, but we're still a family—and, it's still Christmas!"

Before leaving the church, they went up to the *belen* and thanked the Holy Family for the glow of love and understanding that now warmed their once fretful hearts.

"Happy Birthday, Baby Jesus," Mitoy whispered. "Like you, I have a family, too!

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LEA SALONGA
A STORY OF EXCELLENCE

SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST BORN GREAT. OR ARE THEY? Lea Salonga, one of the most successful Filipino performers of our time, seems to be one of those people with greatness thrust upon them at birth. From her exceptional scholastic accomplishments to her award-winning theatrical performances, Lea has an unbroken streak of achievements.

Big imaginations, big dreams
Early discovery must have filled Lea's mind with a lot of creativity. Her imagination was very active as a kid. Not only did she imagine being a singer, she imagined being a famous singer. She spent most of being a toddler singing in front of mirrors, her toys and even pets. Lea would grab anything that resembled a microphone and just imagined being in front of a crowd of thousands.

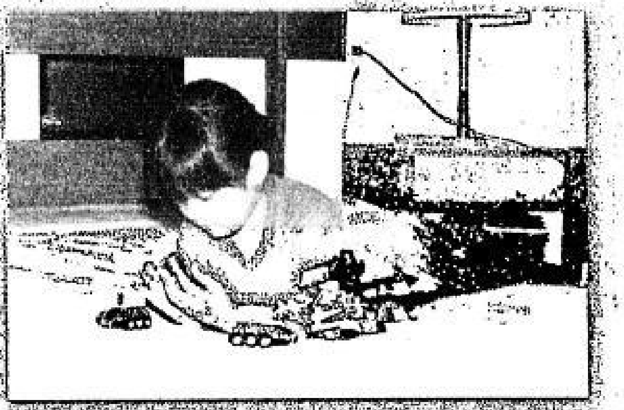
Lea, curious, at 2 years old.

Reminiscing her childhood, Lea smiles and articulates, "Every parent just creates that environment for their child that's safe and creative. You just never know what's going to happen to each child. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was genetic predisposition but I don't remember being stifled."

Her parents gave her everything they could help in her development. They sent her to a good school to ensure that her mental potential was unhampered.

The effects were outstanding.

Lea could build model airplanes without reading the manual. Her mom even thought she was going to be an engineer because she was very good with her hands. She was also quite a reader, bringing books to bed to help her fall asleep.


Lea, absorbed, at 7 years old.

An excellent discovery
Lea's process of discovery started very early in her formative years. At two and a half years old, her inquisitive nature did give her a few bumps and bruises, but it also gave her so much room to grow and know more about the world around her. A little stumble never stopped Lea. With her mom, Ligaya, determined to give her child her best, Lea was constantly encouraged and provided with everything she needed to live a happy and fulfilled childhood.

"She has tapes of me singing in tune. The lyrics wouldn't always be so perfect but I was note-perfect already. She would make me listen to a lot of music; a lot of Olivia Newton John, Abba, The Osmonds and The Carpenters. I guess I was always just surrounded by music, and then came the ballet lessons when I was three or four and the piano lessons when I was six," she fondly speaks of her mom.

"A child psychologist, Dr. Aurora Roldan, claimed that Lea is above the ordinary," Mommy Ligaya proudly says. "It was very encouraging for that to come from someone who knows children. She adds, "Even the manager of Menudo said when we met them that Lea will have a good chance in penetrating the West. They said it, I didn't."

Lea could build model airplanes without reading the manual. Her mom even thought she was going to be an engineer because she was very good with her hands. She was also quite a reader bringing books to bed to help her fall asleep.

Effective learning processes
Studying at OB Montessori was great for Lea. There, she was able to explore her creativity more and excel in things she was passionate about. Early on, her teachers noticed something extraordinary about her. Her associative functions were very developed, despite her tender age.

13 year old Lea displays early excellence.

"The thing about that system of teaching children is that they'll really encourage independence in a child. It's very individualized. You learn to take care of yourself, you learn geography and language. You learn how to read very early. You learn practical skills, like [how to] lace your shoes, shine a pair of shoes. It's all very practical. It's a child learning at his or her own pace. It was very quiet, very peaceful," she says about her alma mater.

The environment at school helped Lea in her MENTAL development because the school promoted expression of opinions and extra-curricular activities. "You're not pigeonholed. I remember being inquisitive, very curious and constantly asking questions."

"A child psychologist, Dr. Aurora Roldan claimed that Lea is above the ordinary. It was very encouraging for that to come from someone who knows children. Mommy Ligaya"

She won the Laurence Olivier, Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, Theater World awards and the one she's most proud of, her Tony.

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Her parents gave her everything they could help in her development. They sent her to a good school to ensure that her mental potential was unhampered.

The effects were outstanding.

Lea could build model airplanes without reading the manual. Her mom even thought she was going to be an engineer because she was very good with her hands. She was also quite a reader, bringing books to bed to help her fall asleep.

Lea, absorbed, at 7 years old.

An excellent discovery

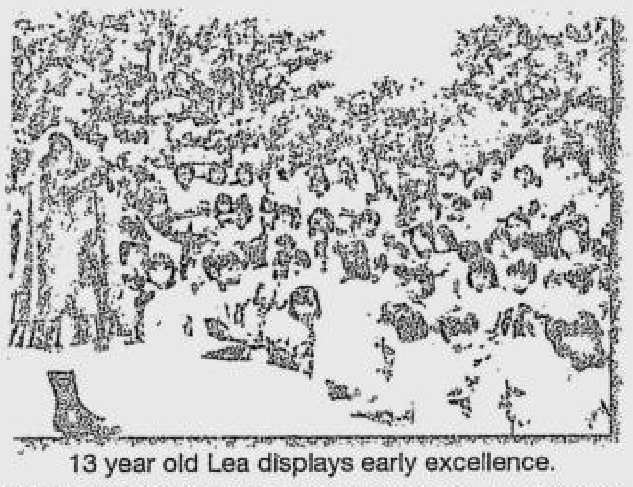
Lea's process of discovery started very early in her formative years. At two and a half years old, her inquisitive nature did give her a few bumps and bruises, but it also gave her so much room to grow and know more about the world around her. A little stumble never stopped Lea. With her mom, Ligaya, determined to give her child her best, Lea was constantly encouraged and provided with everything she needed to live a happy and fulfilled childhood.

"She has tapes of me singing in tune. The lyrics wouldn't always be so perfect but I was note-perfect already. She would make me listen to a lot of music; a lot of Olivia Newton John, Abba, The Osmonds and The Carpenters. I guess I was always just surrounded by music, and then came the ballet lessons when I was three or four and the piano lessons when I was six," she fondly speaks of her mom.

"A child psychologist, Dr. Aurora Roldan, claimed that Lea is above the ordinary," Mommy Ligaya proudly says. "It was very encouraging for that to come from someone who knows children. She adds, "Even the manager of Menudo said when we met them that Lea will have a good chance in penetrating the West. They said it, I didn't."

Effective learning processes

Studying at OB Montessori was great for Lea. There, she was able to explore her creativity more and excel in things she was passionate about. Early on, her teachers noticed something extraordinary about her. Her associative functions were very developed, despite her tender age.



13 year old Lea displays early excellence.

"The thing about that system of teaching children is that they'll really encourage independence in a child. It's very individualized. You learn to take care of yourself, you learn geography and language. You learn how to read very early. You learn practical skills, like [how to] lace your shoes, shine a pair of shoes. It's all very practical. It's a child learning at his or her own pace. It was very quiet, very peaceful," she says about her alma mater.

The environment at school helped Lea in her MENTAL development because the school promoted expression of opinions and extra-curricular activities. "You're not pigeonholed. I remember being inquisitive, very curious and constantly asking questions."

She won the Laurence Olivier, Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, Theater World awards and the one she's most proud of, her Tony.

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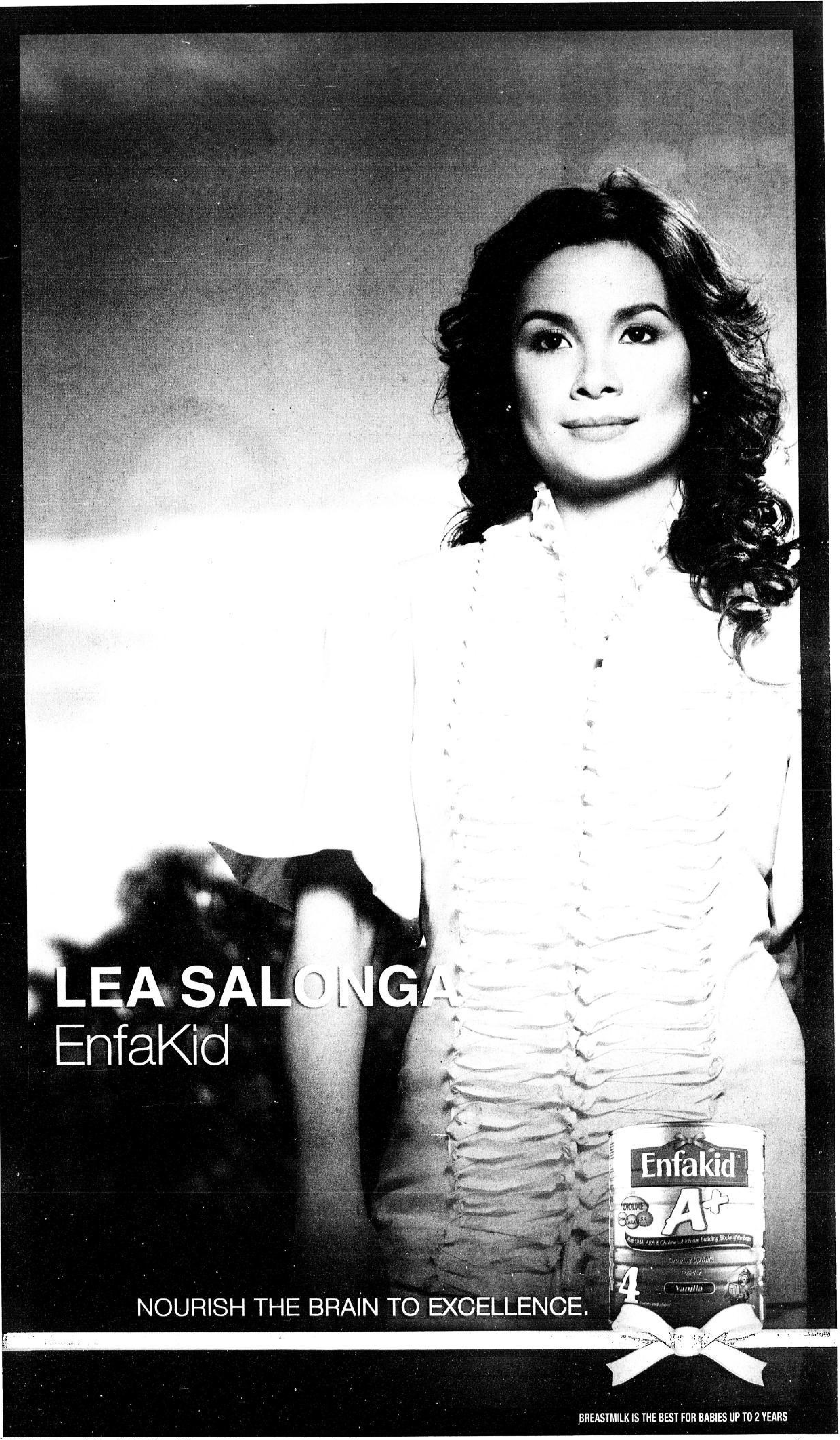
LEA SALONGA
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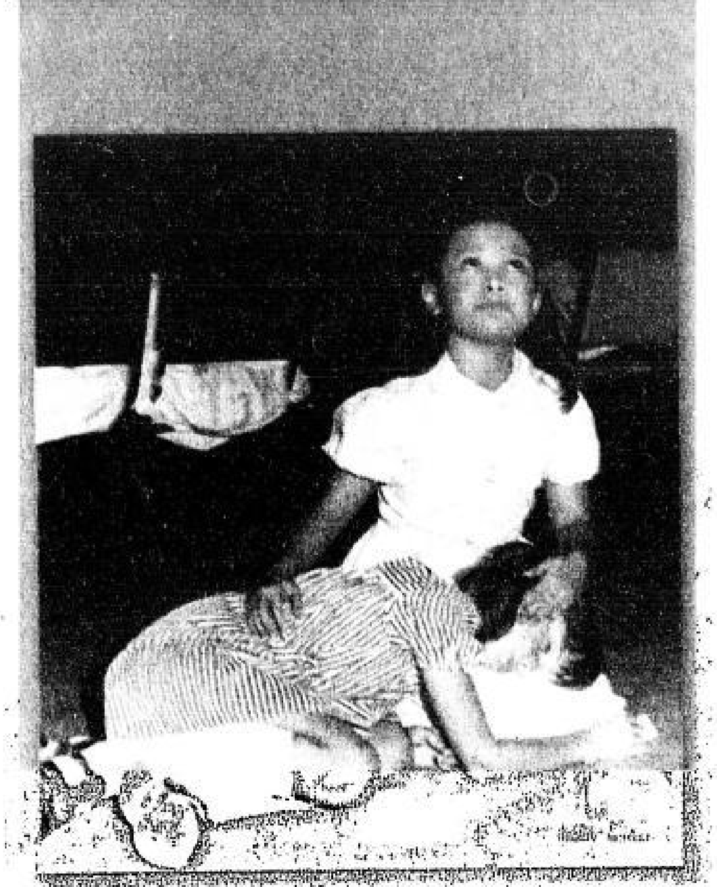
NOURISH THE BRAIN TO EXCELLENCE.
BREASTMILK IS THE BEST FOR BABIES UP TO 2 YEARS


7 year old Lea internalizing and understanding her role.

Lea Salonga today, excellence personified.

A time for everything

Lea recalls her favorite subject, Biology: "In 3rd grade, you already know the animal kingdom. I was listing every invertebrate known to man. It worked because I can remember most of it still. I can remember being in Ateneo [de Manila University] and not having to memorize all that because I already knew it."

Finding time to study, appear in theater and play must be very hard for most kids, but Lea has a different point of view. "It didn't feel like work. For me, everything felt like fun. I was like, grade one. I had time for everything, thankfully." She recollects being threatened by her mom not to be taken to theater rehearsals if she didn't finish her homework, which led to a compromise that she would take her homework to rehearsals.

Lea's mom attributed this to the elbowroom given to her daughter in being expressive and being a true artist while retaining discipline. Making a point to maintain her daughter's childhood, she made certain that Lea's work conformed to her schedule in school. At the same time, she saw to it that Lea got to rehearsals, photo sessions and performances on time. Also, Mommy Ligaya knew that aside from a good environment, the other fundamental thing in a child's development is her nutrition.

"There's nothing to do but to support her in whatever she wants to do and take care of her because she started theater when she was just six years old. She didn't know what to eat—how to feed herself—so I was there for her," reveals Mommy Ligaya, who knows that it is important to give the best to her child both physically and emotionally.

This holistic way of nurturing rubbed off on Lea and she applies this in the way she raises her own daughter, Nic. Today, she's a devoted mother who still manages to make time for herself. She shares, "I make sure that I have time to go to the spa, get a manicure and get my hair cut and colored. You have to get away." The balance she sustains between her professional and personal life is key. "I have to spend time with my friends. I need to have healthy relationships with a lot of different people. Knit a scarf or watch a movie by myself. Sometimes, I end up playing video games for hours and hours and I forget about everything else," Lea candidly quips.

Paying it forward

Even with a busy schedule, Lea never neglects her maternal duties, She has this to say, "I try to be hands-on with her. She's very attached to me. I try to encourage love for music in her. She's probably going to be pretty advanced as a child growing up."

All the support and care Lea got as a child growing up into a magnificent lady is exactly the kind of treatment she wants to give Nic, who seems to take after her mother's musical inclination. Just a few months shy of turning two, Nic is showing great potential in music and the arts as she appreciates musicals like Hairspray and would watch and really focus on the movie. She would even dance to the tunes when they are played.

> There's nothing to do but to support her in whatever she wants to do and take care of her because she started theater when she was just six years old. She didn't know what to eat how to feed herself-so I was there for her
> Mommy Ligaya

Just as her own mother was to her every step of the way, Lea wants the best for her own daughter. "I just look at her. There's no way I can ever harm her."

"As for maximizing her full potential, all I can do is be open to whatever aptitudes and inclinations she has. Right now, she's loving dancing and sings a little bit. It seems almost like a that she'll enter into the world of entertainment like many of her relatives before her. To maximize her potential includes training in the field she wants to enter, making sure she's in a school that exercises both sides of her brain and to keep her a child for as long as possible."

Being more than just excellent

Among other factors, proper care and nourishment played vital roles in Lea's growth and her development in achieving greatness. Her desire to succeed was complemented by an intelligent mind that could keep up with the eventual success. Lea is talented, no doubt. However, without the proper care, nutrition, motivation and environment, her potentials might have not been maximized.

"A lot of things helped; having a strong and supportive family, a strong support system of good friends, and lots of faith and prayer," Lea talks about her success. "Having my daughter was especially humbling when I was doing Les Miz in New York. Yeah, Mommy will get applause after a show and sign autographs at the stage door. But once she comes home, she still has to clean up the poop!"

After all that's been said and done, priorities change and all Lea longs for is the best for her daughter, just the way her own mother gave the best to her. Now, trophies pale in comparison to the one trophy she considers as the epitome of true greatness: Motherhood.

Yes, some are born great, but greatness also comes to those whose mental potential is unhampered with the correct nourishment and through the moms who only give their child the best.

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